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This number is the last of an originally planned series of three, for which the Editors have assumed joint responsibility.

Beginning with the next number articles will be signed. We have already received contributions from two of our colleagues, and the first of these will appear in No. 4.

No. 4 will contain:

C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: Caste in the Multi-Ethnic Society of Nepal.

L. Dumont: World Renunciation in Indian Religions.

D. F. Pocock: Sociologies – rural and urban.

FOREWORD

The aim of this issue is to appraise the present state of our study of Indian religion by a critical examination of some important contributions published in recent years. We are mainly concerned with the religion of the Hindu people of India as it can be observed today, or what has sometimes been called Popular Hinduism. For the sake of brevity, we shall call it Hinduism, bearing in mind, however, that strictly speaking it forms only a part of, or consists of only one level of Hinduism. This may seem to beg the question of the definition of Hinduism, a problem with which we cannot deal directly in these pages, although some aspects of it will be touched upon. Here, only group religion will be dealt with, as opposed to religion adopted by individual choice. We take our point of departure from life itself, not from texts, from rites and beliefs, not from speculation and philosophy. This approach is derived from the particular postulates and methods of our discipline. It does not at all mean that we intend to disregard the existence of sanyasis and sects, to minimize the importance of literary brahmanism, or to overlook the intimate relation between religion and speculative thought in Hinduism generally. We would object only to narrow definitions and arbitrary dichotomies. There is nowadays a widespread tendency to equate Hinduism with higher speculation and ethics and to reject from its definition the actual religion of the Hindu masses because of their addiction to so-called crude practices and superstitions.[1] The sociologist,

[1] See below, p. 57. Of course, this tendency rests in general on any but scientific motivation. It is part of the interaction with the West. In a brilliant pamphlet, B. K. Chatterjee accused Westerners of being unfair when comparing their ethics with Indian superstitions (*Letters on Hinduism*, Calcutta, 1940). This does not apply to the sociologist, whose methods are the same wherever they are employed.

on the contrary, takes very seriously what these people do and think. For him, this level of Hinduism is of fundamental importance[2] because he hopes that the systematic consideration of it will help him to avoid the pitfalls inherent in any attempt to define Hinduism. That is to say, such consideration will help the sociologist to see as one whole all the rich diversity in Indian religious developments.

For the present, we shall limit ourselves to this observed common Hinduism which has been the object of description for a long time, and the object of sociological consideration for the past few years. The contention is that a few basic features may be seen to emerge already with a considerable degree of certainty, and accordingly, something of the elusive figure of Hinduism can be delineated. Three kinds of complementary relationships may be defined: most fundamental is that which opposes and links the pure and the impure; second comes the double relationship to the Divine, through possession and through priesthood. These two complementary relationships can be sufficiently documented from the literature on the subject, sociological and ethnographical. An Appendix will show a third and last complementary relationship, that between male and female deities in locality cults.

[2] The point has been treated at some length in these pages, see *Contributions*, I, p. 12 sq.

PURE AND IMPURE

M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952. xvi-268 p., 12 pl., 4 figs., bibl., index. Foreword by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown.

Of the three books to be examined here, this is the only one strictly sociological. It is the first monograph of an Indian caste group containing an analysis and not simply a description, and the first study of Indian religion to ask *Who*? and not simply *What*? The book has become a classic within a few years of its publication, and it is now relatively easy to attempt a separation of its solid core from more questionable developments. To mention three of its chief merits, there is first of all the fact that in the ritual, the author distinguishes the cults of different social groups. Secondly, he recognizes that the Coorgs participate in a wider religion, namely Hinduism. And thirdly – and in our opinion this is the central point of the book, as it is of the subject matter – the opposition between Purity and Impurity, for the first time, is analysed with excellent material at hand, and with all the attention which it deserves. There is, of course, room for the discussion of details; but these three points encompass, we believe, the solid foundations upon which our study can develop.

Less profitable are the views derived from the narrower side of Radcliffe-Brown's theory of religion. However great the merits of this scholar, there are moments when he assumes, implicitly or explicitly, that religion can be reduced, in its essentials, to a number of rites the meaning of each of which lies in what can be shown immediately to be its contribution to the maintenance of the social order.[1] It must be said that in his analysis

[1] The main fault here lies in atomization, i.e. the assumption that a ritual element can be isolated from the sequence in which it is embedded and directly related to something outside. The need for studying, not elements, but "ceremonial sequences" was clearly expressed by A. Van Gennep as early as 1909 in his classical *Rites de passage* (p. 14 etc.; see below, p. 32, note 20). On this point, Radcliffe-Brown narrowed down Durkheim's views. It is true that Durkheim himself was occasionally crude,

of the Coorgs, the author, while trying his best to develop this thesis of his master, carefully noted at the same time cases which did not seem to fit in with the theory. Indeed, the reader is tempted to attribute to such scholarly doubts the slight uneasiness which he perceives here and there in the book. However this may be, the theory leads, for instance, to an analysis of marriage rites which defeats its own purpose. If most of the minute ritual gestures and observances are simply means of showing "solidarity" or "concern", then one may well wonder if such a uniform content can account for the diversity of concrete actions, and furthermore, the essence of things being so simple, if there is any need at all to build up a sociology. We shall attempt to show, *en passant*, that things are not so simple, and we shall try to indicate how ritual detail can be placed in its proper perspective – general as well as Indian.

After a general introduction and a chapter devoted to "Social Structure", there follows a consideration of "The Ritual Idiom of Coorgs" which contains the greater part of the analysis which interests us most, and to which we shall return. The next chapter, entitled "The Cult of the Okka", deals in the main (p. 122-158) with the legal aspects of marriage ceremonies, while its concluding part is concerned with the cult of the *okka*. This term introduces some ambiguity as it corresponds in part to "joint-family", whereas the main part of the cult is that of a lineage. This and the following chapter on "The Cult of the Larger Social Units" (villages, etc.), although they contain some analysis of social organization and religion, are mainly descriptive. The book concludes with two short chapters on "Hinduism" and "Religion and Society". As regards "Hinduism", the author puts together and develops a number of observations made previously concerning the relation between Coorg religion and Hinduism. This problem, which has recently been called the relation between the "little tradition" and the "great tradition", constitutes the second theme of the work, and we shall devote a few words to it below (p. 40).

To return to "The Ritual Idiom of Coorgs", the two chapters devoted to it are not, to our mind, of equal importance. Chapter III deals with *mangala*, an auspicious ceremony found in marriage (or more precisely constituting one half of the marriage ceremonies, while the other half corresponds to the legal proceedings described in detail in Chapter V).

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but for him the function of ritual is to reinforce the "ultimate value attitudes, the sentiments on which social structure and solidarity depend", in other words "to fortify faith" (Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, ed. 1949, p. 436).

Chapter IV deals with purity (*maḍi*) and impurity (*pole*), which were by no means absent from the preceding chapter. As *mangala* is not as fundamental as purity and impurity, we shall reverse the order and deal mainly with the latter, adding only a few words on marriage.

In Chapter IV, the author enumerates the various concrete forms of "ritual" purity and impurity distinguished by the Coorgs, shows their relation to social organization, and examines the relations between the two opposites. Apart from one paragraph dealing with purity in the village festival, the main development relates to impurity arising from crises in the individual's life (death, birth, menstruation). Quite appropriately, greatest attention is given to the most extreme and complex form of impurity, namely death pollution, and a detailed analysis of mourning constitutes the central theme of the chapter. As in our previous treatment of Bouglé's and Hocart's writings, we shall approach this work with an uncompromisingly critical mind in order to ascertain what is in it which remains valid. In our view the basic approach of the book is sound, and once some adventitious outgrowths are cleared away, it will be possible to proceed a little further. Our main criticism will be of Radcliffe-Brown's abstractions, upon which our author too confidently relies. But to be brief, let us first of all emphasize the need of a general theory of mourning.

There is some confusion between the state of the dead person during and after the period of mourning, between, say, the ghost and the ancestor. This seems hardly permissible in view of the clarity of orthodox Hindu ritual and belief on this matter. So it would appear, at least, if the latter are considered in the light of the theory of "double obsequies" put forward by Robert Hertz mainly from his discussion of Oceanic customs.[2] At first, the dead Hindu is (in Sanskrit) a *preta*, a "departed", until, at the end of mourning, he becomes a *pitṛ*, "father", ancestor.[3] Hertz has shown, and the Indian example bears out his theory, that the mourning period corresponds, in the belief, to a marginal state of the departed spirit, intermediate between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It is only with the end of the period of mourning, and, in the most classical form, with the final disposal of the remains

[2] Robert Hertz, "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort", in *Année Sociologique*, X (1907), reprinted in *Mélanges de Sociologie religieuse et de Folklore* (Paris, 1928), p. 1-98. An English translation is in preparation.

[3] Explicitely noted by Hertz: *Mélanges*, p. 77, n. 2 (on Indian rituals, see also p. 25, n. 4 – cremation, and p. 38, n. 4 – Todas).

(the second obsequies) of the departed, that the definitive stage is reached. The positive and negative obligations of the mourners correspond to the intermediary, precarious, and, for the living, dangerous state of the departed. This theory may be regarded as having brought to a close the controversies relative to mourning observances, whether regarded as arising from the "Fear of the Dead", or on the contrary, as rooted in the necessary solidarity with the deceased and the obligation to help him,[4] a dual aspect which seems to have puzzled also our author. The same theory can shed some light on the distinction between principal mourners and other mourners, which, following Radcliffe-Brown, Professor Srinivas interprets in terms of "concern". Concern is not enough because there is a necessity which binds the welfare of the living to that of the dead. There is no objection to the emphasis placed primarily on the relation between mourning customs, on the one hand, and kinship and the family on the other. But it is impossible to account for the basic ideas involved in terms of social organization alone, as may be seen from the fact that peoples with different types of social organization share the same ideas. Furthermore, while the author shows a tendency in this book to account for certain forms of impurity in terms of "concern", and the basic unity of all forms of impurity is implied, yet, no attempt is made to account for caste impurity in these terms.

The concepts utilized by Professor Srinivas in his analysis are borrowed from Radcliffe-Brown. It is therefore proper to go to their source for a better understanding of them, and as some of Radcliffe-Brown's concepts have been submitted to a penetrating criticism by Franz Steiner in his posthumous work, *Taboo*, we can do no better than refer the reader to that work.[5] One point which Steiner does not mention is the extension, frequent in present-day literature, of the use of the adjective "ritual". In the book under consideration, as in Radcliffe-Brown's writings, things are called "ritual" in preference to being called "religious". When we read, as we do so often here, of "social and ritual status", what is meant is social and religious status. In our opinion, this is unwarranted and dangerous. In the proper sense of the word, ritual is opposed to belief, each representing one aspect of religion: religious action and religious thought. On the other hand, "religious" is opposed to "social" (either

[4] Cf. G. A. Wilken, "Über das Haaropfer und einige andere Trauergebräuche bei den Völkern Indonesiens" (*Revue Coloniale Intern.*, 1886-87), in *De Verspreide Geschriften*, III, p. 399-531.

[5] Franz Steiner, *Taboo* (London, 1956).

as a part to the whole, or perhaps as religious to non-religious), but no such relation exists between "ritual" and "social". The use of the word "ritual" instead of "religious" is legitimate only when actions are considered and not ideas, as in the phrase, "an ordinary bath and a ritual bath". It is not legitimate to oppose "social" to "ritual", as "social" must imply ideas and values as well as actions. Why, then, has Radcliffe-Brown chosen to speak of "ritual status" rather than of "religious status"? The answer lies, apparently, in the behaviouristic bias of this scholar. For him, of the two constituent parts of religion – ritual and belief – only ritual is immediately relevant to the social order, while belief is conceived as nothing more than an ideological counterpart, or support, of ritual, bearing no direct relation to society. This view seems to be as unfortunate as the opposite one, which attempts to find the consistency of religion only in the realm of beliefs, implying that rites are just the transcription, on a secondary level, of beliefs. In neither of these views is man regarded, as he should be, as an acting-and-thinking, or living-and-thinking being.[6] We have already seen an example of the behaviouristic twist in the attempt to account for mourning as "social concern" without considering the underlying ideas about the fate of the deceased and its relation to the condition of the surviving kinsmen.[7]

Professor Srinivas writes both of "ritual status" and of "ritual value". The concept of "ritual value" has been aptly criticized by Steiner (op. cit. p. 119). The word "status", or rather "ritual status" is used here to denote two things of the same nature: on the one hand, the place of a

[6] Nadel has very aptly shown the necessity for the anthropologist to transcend the concept of "behaviour" and reach that of "action", i.e. purposeful behaviour, in which precisely the thinking aspect is implied (*The Foundations of Social Anthropology*, London, 1953, p. 33 sq.). There is some reason for dissatisfaction, on the subject of the relation between rite and myth, even in such an author as Professor Lévi-Strauss: "...the sociologists or anthropologists who have been interested in the relation between myth and rite have seen this relation as, in a sense, a superfluity... the myth and the rite reproduce each other, the one on the level of action, the other on the level of ideas... strange duplication" (translated from the French of "Structure et Dialectique" in *For Roman Jakobson*, The Hague, 1956, p. 289). Talcott Parsons wrote more appositely, "...our relations to these non-empirical aspects [expressed in religion] are not merely cognitive, but also involve active attitudes... Religious ideas [as distinguished from philosophical] are ideas in relation to action, not merely to thought." (*The Structure of Social Action*, 2nd ed., 1949, p. 431).

[7] Radcliffe-Brown wrote in one place: "To discover the social function of the totemic rites we have to consider the whole body of cosmological ideas of which each rite is a partial expression" ("Taboo" in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, p. 145); he even added that these ideas are kept alive "by their regular expression in myth and rite". Unfortunately, a few pages further, he accounts for pregnancy taboos in terms of "concern".

caste in the hierarchy (determined by its degree of purity-impurity in relation to other castes), and on the other hand, within a given caste, the purity-impurity level of an individual at a given moment in relation to other individuals, as determined by events occurring in his family or in his own life. While the status of a caste is stable, the relative level of purity-impurity of the individual changes in time. It is possible to show that Professor Srinivas is insufficiently aware of these unceasing changes, and it is not improbable that the word "status", with its suggestion of stability, permanence, equilibrium, has been a hindrance to him in this respect. While he compares most carefully the relative levels of purity-impurity (we shall henceforth call them purity levels, for short) of people in different circumstances – as, for instance, of a Coorg in ordinary circumstances, or engaged in a village festival, or engaged in mourning – yet, he represents one of them, say the mourner, as remaining at the same level, or having the same "status", throughout the whole period of mourning, from beginning to end. There are good reasons to think that this is not so, and that, in time, the mourner's impurity decreases in some way. Professor Srinivas observes that the appropriate ritual – a bath – washes off impurity only in certain circumstances. The mourners have to wait for a number of days before getting rid of impurity through the appropriate ritual, including a bath. Does this not mean that, in the meantime, impurity has decreased to the point where a bath rids one of it? Still more, steps in the decrease of impurity are marked in the ritual:

> On the eleventh day, each of the second-grade mourners attains partial freedom from mourning after he has offered rice ... (p. 114) ... the *māda* ceremony [usually performed on the 12th day, sometimes later] frees all mourners from ritual mourning, but not, however, the first grade mourners, who are only freed at the *dīkshe uttuva* ceremony, which is performed long after the *māda*. Until then, honey and milk may not be consumed, ornaments and coloured cloths may not be worn. A woman mourner has to wear the mourning uniform of white shoulder-cloth and waist-cloth. A man mourner may not have his face or head shaved (p. 112-113).

This shows that there are several successive "ends of mourning", each marked by a certain diminution of impurity, as is indicated by the word "partial" in the first quotation, and again by the fact that on the *māda* day all are freed from impurity except those who, being very close relatives and having special duties to perform, were regarded from the start as being more impure than others. But even for them, something changes on that day. Food restrictions become much milder, as may be seen from a comparison of the restrictions mentioned above with those

in force until then: "they may not have more than one meal a day, and they have to pay scrupulous attention to the food restrictions." [Mourners of the third grade] "have to abstain from meat, fish, mushrooms, liquor, honey, milk and betel leaves" (p. 112). We may say, then, that on the *māda* day there is a general diminution of impurity for all categories of mourners; but while the less affected get rid of it completely, the more affected continue to carry a remnant of it for a considerable time. The first shaving of mourners can be viewed in the same way:

> all men mourners indicate [?] the beginning of mourning by having the head and face shaved on the morning following the disposal of the corpse (p. 112; also p. 81).

Does not the period of mourning begin as soon as the news of the death is known? Then what can happen on the day following the disposal of the corpse? Does not this shave mark an end as well as, if not more than, a beginning, namely, the end of the first and most acute stage of the crisis (occurrence of death and first measure of disposal of the body), and does not the commencement of ritual mourning mark a more settled stage, i.e. a first diminution of the level of impurity? This interpretation seems to accord better with the place assigned to shaving at the end of the period of mourning, be it on the *māda* day or on *dīkshe uttuva.*

To sum up, impurity has a tendency to decrease in time. This is taken into account by the ritual which transforms it into a series of progressive steps towards liquidation.[8] It is not profitable to attempt greater precision, because, as we shall see, impurity is relative. It is regrettable that the point was missed, because it would have strengthened the case for the symmetry of purity and impurity, as the same process which we found with reference to mourning appears also, in reverse, in the village festival, i.e. in relation to positive sacredness. Village festivals last a number of days; while on the last day, "regarded as the most important" elaborate ritual including sacrifices is performed, and the various restrictions observed during the festival come to an end, these restrictions culminate on the previous day, marked by a fast. We read that "It is difficult to see the purpose of the fast day during the festival of a village-deity" (p. 116). This is not difficult, if we know that restrictions remain in force during the entire period of preparation for the ritual of the last day, and if we understand the necessity for purity to be increased in a special manner on the previous day. Classical Indian examples come to mind.

[8] The gradual decrease of impurity has been described among the Brahmans of Gujerat by Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson (*The Rites of the Twice-Born*, 1920, p. 157 sq.).

The elaborate preparations, called *dīkshā*, of the great vedic sacrifice of *soma* have been studied by philologists, and the problem of how ordinary beings can be brought into connection with the sacred has been dealt with in detail by the authors of the Brahmanas and their modern interpreters.[9] The village festival of the Coorgs, although it is less elaborate, faces the same questions and deals with them in a similar way. It is striking that the same word – *dīkshe* – is used among the Coorgs to mean mourning. Again, this is a scholarly form, or *tatsam*, but the same context most probably gives also a popular equivalent, or *tadbhav*: death pollution is called *tīke*. The vedic word denoting ascetic observances preliminary to sacrifice is used here for mourning, and even death pollution. This assimilation done through the ages, diachronically, goes to justify our speaking of purity and impurity as being symmetrical, or of positive and negative sacredness.[10]

Among the different relative levels of purity which he distinguishes, mostly according to the Coorgs, Professor Srinivas introduces what he calls "normal ritual status":

> Normal ritual status is the status which a person enjoys most of the time. From this point of view, both *maḍi* and *pole*, both ritual purity and impurity, are deviations from the normal. Death-pollution is also an abnormal ritual condition, lasting only for a short period, comparatively speaking.
>
> There is no term in Kodagi for normal ritual status. When Coorgs want to describe this condition they resort to the Kannada (and also Telugu) term *mailige*. It is interesting to note that the soiled clothes which a washerman takes away are *mailige*, and the clean clothes which he brings back are *maḍi*. The washerman himself is referred to as *maḍivāla*.
>
> Ritual impurity, normal ritual status, and ritual purity form a hierarchy. If a person in an impure condition touches another in a condition of either purity or normal ritual status, the latter becomes impure. If a person in a condition of normal ritual status touches another in a pure condition, the latter looses his purity and is reduced to normal ritual status. That is, normal ritual status is a mild form of impurity (p. 106-107).

What is referred to here, in opposition to both purity and impurity, is the state or condition of a person having nothing to do with ritual, acting

[9] Hubert and Mauss, in their Essay on Sacrifice (*Contributions*, I, p. 7, n. 2), devote a section to these "Entry Rites". Cf. H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda* (1917), p. 397.

[10] It will be shown later on that it is better to distinguish between purity and sacredness (see p. 31). We read also in the Abbé Dubois that "diksha" designates, presumably in Mysore itself, the ceremony marking the initiation into a sect. (*Mœurs, Institutions et Cérémonies*, Paris, 1825, I, p. 156).

outside the religious field, and engaged in ordinary or profane pursuits. Most individuals spend the greater part of their life in this condition. It might be called ordinary, or average, or neutral, or profane, but certainly neither normal nor ritual nor ritually normal. Now from the point of view of the Coorgs, they have no word for it, but can denote it by a Kannada word meaning dirty or soiled. But this is no justification for calling this state "normal ritual status" and concluding, on the strength of this term and of its relation with purity, that "normal ritual status is a mild form of impurity". We can only say that most Coorgs spend most of their lives in a state which is neutral as compared with both extremes, and which appears as impurity in relation to purity, and as purity in relation to impurity. The word used shows a stress on the first of these relations.

Our author is generally at great pains to keep close to the relative character of all these notions, but here he departs from this attitude. And here, precisely, we are in the very midst of relativeness; there is no escape for us; we must discard the reassuring but unjustified expression of "normal ritual status". An example will show how this unhappy phrase can blur a simple picture. In his analysis of the use of ritual bath, Professor Srinivas deems it necessary to distinguish two cases:

> (A ritual bath) adds to his [the subject's] ritual purity and makes him fit to pray, or to be possessed...
>
> But sometimes the emphasis is on the bath terminating a condition of ritual impurity... instead of a bath adding purity to normal ritual status, it might only be putting an end to ritual impurity, which is a condition inferior to normal ritual status (p. 83).

In actual fact, the bath works in the same way in both cases: it transfers the person from a (relatively) impure state to a (relatively) pure state. Moreover, the range of the transfer is limited, and one of its ends is always the neutral condition: the bath can take a person from (mild) impurity to a neutral condition, or from a neutral condition to a degree of purity sufficient for certain rites. We shall come back to the interpretation of the bath, and also to the place of the neutral or profane condition in the system.

At this point, it is best to turn our attention to the basic specific feature of the Indian situation, which is likely to be involved directly or indirectly in any discussion to come, namely the permanent attribution to groups of people of a certain relative degree of purity-impurity as their status in society. On reading Professor Srinivas anew, one is surprised to find

that, although he is clear, he is perhaps less explicit and articulate on this point than one had thought. However, he writes:

> The concept of pollution governs relations between different castes. This concept is absolutely fundamental to the caste system ... (p. 26).
>
> Some occupations are considered defiling because of the contact with some defiling object or other necessary to their practice. Swine-herding is defiling because swine defile. Leather defiles, and consequently the making and repairing of shoes is an occupation of the Untouchables. ... Finally, any occupation however remotely implying the destruction of sentient life in any form would be prohibited to the high castes (p. 28).

More important is the opening of section V in our chapter:

> The ritual concepts of *maḍi* and *pole* are intimately related to the social structure. A member of a high caste is in a condition of *maḍi* in relation to a member of a low caste, and the latter is in a condition of *pole* in relation to the former. There is a ban on contact between castes belonging to different strata (p. 108).

It is clearly implied here that the two kinds of impurity are of the same nature. But no systematic attempt is made to relate caste impurity to that arising from crises in the individual's life. On this, Professor P. V. Kane is more forceful:

> The underlying notions of untouchability are religious and ceremonial purity and impurity. A man's nearest and dearest women relatives such as his own mother, wife or daughter are untouchable to him during their monthly periods. To him the most affectionate friend is untouchable for several days when the latter is in mourning due to death in the latter's family. A person cannot touch his own son (whose thread ceremony has been performed) at the time of taking meals. (*History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, 1, p. 170).

This statement opens up an ideal transition from one sort of impurity to the other. For, one may ask, what would happen if the temporarily untouchable person did not get cleansed through the appropriate ritual, and then, how does one actually get rid of this untouchability or pollution? While speaking of time elapsing, of the bath, shaving and other rites, we have seen only one half of this process of cleansing, and this one half in its broad outline is not specifically Indian, but is common to Indian and many other, simpler, societies. The typically Indian half of the cleansing process consists, as Hocart taught us, in the employment of specialists who take upon themselves a part of the impurity, and to whom it remains permanently attached. These people, by virtue of their specialized ritual functions, live permanently in that state of impurity which they help others to abandon as rapidly as possible. Not much is said in this book about the functions of Untouchables in the disposal of

the dead or as scavengers, and it is true that these are not the only reasons for their impurity, the others being the secondary products of the social system itself, as our author would probably agree (see p. 28). It also must be said that the equivalence between the one sort of impurity and the other appears clearly in certain circumstances, as for instance when, during the first days of the village festivals, menstruating women as well as Poleyas (Untouchables) are kept apart.[11] There are two specialists whose case is simpler, and whose low status Hocart has connected directly with the immediate sources of impurity: the washerman, for Hocart, is essentially the man who washes (birth- and) menses-soiled clothes, and the barber is the priest officiating at funerals on the burial or cremation ground. The impurity of the respective states attaches to these people. What does Professor Srinivas say about the washerman?

We have already seen that the clothes washed by the washerman are, for Coorgs, pure (*maḍi*) and that he is called *maḍivāla* (p. 106, quoted above, p. 16; also p. 41 of the book), which we can perhaps most closely translate as "the purifier". On the same page (41) we read, together with this, that "contact with a barber defiles a Coorg, and every Coorg has to take a purificatory bath after being shaved by a barber". As there must be some similarity between the status of the barber and that of the washerman, it is probably wise not to take the name of the washerman to mean more vaguely "the pure one"; rather, we must be prepared to admit that, while the clothes brought by him are pure, he himself may not be so. In another passage, where the difference between (physical) cleanliness and (ritual) purity is excellently shown, we read that for orthodox Brahmans a snow white dhoti brought by the washerman is impure in relation to the cult (while they tie round their waist a piece of cloth which may look dirty but is pure because they dip it themselves in water; p. 83). We are thus reminded once more that everything here is relative.

Among Coorgs, the washerman sprinkles the house on the 7th or 12th day after a birth, and "this act rids the house of its impurity", but, we are told, "Nowadays ... Coorgs increasingly call on a Brahmin" to perform this purification. "It is probable that the washerman was employed as purifier because of his occupation" (p. 85). Clearly this function of the washerman is connected more especially with his role in the particular circumstance: the birth-soiled clothes are more impure

[11] The same happens in Manu: "When he has touched a Candala, a menstruating woman, an outcast, a woman in childbed, a corpse ... he becomes pure by bathing" (V, 85, transl. Bühler, SBE).

than ordinary soiled clothes, and just as the washerman purifies them by this washing, he also is called to purify the house from the same impurity. The author goes on:

> But such a duty is not consistent with the position he occupies in the caste hierarchy. For instance, he is prohibited from entering ... the kitchen and the central hall ...; if he has to enter them in the exercise of his duties – at marriage ... – they are purified subsequently. But no such inconsistency exists in the case of the Brahmin, and the increasing tendency to employ him is part of the general process of sanskritization of Coorg customs (p. 85).

We are told here that there is an inconsistency between the fact that the washerman purifies the house after a birth and the fact that, when he enters it for a marriage, the same house has to be purified. It is not sure that inconsistency here is more than apparent. First, in the case of a house as in the case, discussed above, of people, we should remember that the level of relative purity varies in time. In this case, not only the house in which a birth has taken place is impure, but we may even surmise from what we know generally of marriage in India, that the house in which a marriage is about to take place is pure in the same way as a person is pure before performing rites addressed to the gods (see below p. 23). The author does not see this because he has a tendency to attach "ritual values" permanently to things, as is clear from much of his analysis in Chapter III. It is true that there are things to which sacredness of one sort or another is permanently attached, but there are many more which can be either pure, impure, or neutral according to the circumstances. We are not dealing with a dichotomy in things but with an opposition in ideas.[12] Now it may well be asked how the washerman, being impure, can purify the house. This is done by analogy with the birth-clothes which the washerman purifies by taking their impurity upon himself. We touch here on the dual aspect of such functions, and from Hocart's view we can derive a way of understanding the alleged inconsistency. If the washerman is impure because he washes a certain kind of soiled clothes, and by so doing purifies them in relation to their users, then he can be seen in two different ways in two different contexts: either, within his specialized religious function, as a purifying agent, or, outside this function, as an impure person. This is precisely the case discussed above: in purifying the house, the washerman acts within his

[12] Nor is it a question of the sacred and the non-sacred, the latter being in this case, as we have already seen, a very vague and relative matter. Curiously it is said at the beginning of the chapter which deals in fact with pure and impure: "The external world is divided into two parts, the sacred and the non-sacred" (p. 101).

religious function, whereas in adorning the marriage room, he acts merely as someone who has a monopoly on procuring cloth for such purposes, and accordingly, is considered as impure. To conclude, there is no inconsistency in the case for two reasons, first, because the "status" of the house in the two circumstances is not the same, and second, because the washerman does not act in the same capacity. If not only their observer, but also the Coorgs themselves see an inconsistency here, this may well mean that they have become estranged from their traditional, structural, world. To bring our discussion of the washerman to a close, we can understand why, here and there in India, orthodox people dip in water clothes washed by him before wearing them: the washerman has dealt with the specific impurity (together with mere dirt) of the clothes, but his own, diffuse, impurity has attached itself to them.

Interpretation is more delicate regarding the barber. Had he a specific religious function in funerals, then we could understand his case as that of the washerman. But apparently he has none here, nor in Mysore in general. He shaves the mourners, but he shaves men in other circumstances as well. There is perhaps a qualitative difference, as tuft and moustache are shaved only at mourning[13] (p. 81). The barber is, in fact, associated with death, but only vaguely: his name is not pronounced after nightfall:

> a barber is inauspicious, and contact with him is defiling. He is also associated with inauspicious occasions such as death, as mourners have to be shaved. Women especially dread the barber ... [because widows were shaved] (p. 89).

It has already been noted that most of the time Professor Srinivas is careful to make only relative statements. We shall now refer to other examples, abundantly provided in this excellent Coorg material, to attempt to see more precisely the relativity of these notions. The dual, or multiple, end of the period of mourning has been mentioned, and it is paralleled by the dual end of birth impurity:

> On the 12th day [the mother...] attains partial purity after a bath ... enters the central hall and the kitchen but not the southwestern room ... complete purity is attained only on the 60th day [after a bath, etc.] (p. 83).

What is "partial" purity, which appears here as in the former case? It is purity in relation to certain pursuits but not in relation to others. After

[13] Ritual shaving would demand special analysis. It is not dealt with here, among other reasons, because of its complexity, which would require a consideration of facts which are not mentioned here, as for instance the dedication of the hair to a deity.

the 12th day, the mother is no longer impure in relation to the kitchen (she can presumably cook?), but she is still impure in relation to the most sacred part of the house, the southwestern room. A rough generalization seems possible: in the course of the more extreme kinds of impurity (death, birth) a moment comes when the person is no longer impure in relation to profane pursuits (neutral level), but remains impure in relation to positive sacredness (gods, etc.); or again, this person is neutral from one point of view, impure from another. A situation of the same kind appears in regard to menstruating women:

> Though women no longer observe seclusion during their periods, they are even now afraid of going near the cobra-platform [the platform of cobra-deities within the house compound] because of the belief that its defilement would result in some misfortune to their okka (p. 166).

In this case the impurity is neglected in relation to everything except deities. (There is a slight complication here: in the compound there is also an ancestor-shrine, or platform, the approach to which was also forbidden in the past; compared to it the cobra-deity is believed to be "specially sensitive to defilement".) On this same subject there is another passage, slightly different:

> Coorg women do not nowadays observe any restrictions during their periods. This is surprising as elsewhere in south India these restrictions are still in force (p. 102).

We shall take "restrictions" here to mean seclusion, so that the passage does not conflict with the previous one. Something can perhaps be said about the difference with South India in general. A situation very similar to the Coorg one has been adduced from another South Indian group, living like the Coorgs in relative territorial segregation.[14] We may propose the hypothesis that the restrictions are not found in cases where the caste lives in relative isolation, and remain in force in places where a greater number of castes live together. This can be justified by a brief discussion about the neutral or profane condition. It is this state which constitutes in the matter the articulation between intra-caste and inter-caste relations. While it appears as profane within the group, as

[14] Among the Tamil-speaking Pramalai Kallar: "The seclusion of women during their periods is scarcely noticed. It is limited to three days or even one day, and the corresponding cooking taboo is really kept only where the woman can be easily replaced by another. The absence of any cult or religious image in the house, which prevents the impure woman from coming into contact with the sacred, is probably a reason for this laxity." (translated from: L. Dumont, *Une sous-caste de l'Inde du sud*, Paris-The Hague, 1957, p. 210).

contrasted with purity and impurity, on the contrary it is this condition which is taken as the basis for comparison between different castes: a man who is neither pure nor impure for his kin and caste fellows, appears as relatively pure in relation to a man of a lower caste in the same condition. While this state has no religious significance within the group, it does have one outside it. (This is perhaps why Professor Srinivas calls it "normal ritual status"). Hence, we can understand that, in an ideal isolated group of medium status, there would be a tendency for the neutral or profane condition to enlarge its bounds by disregarding mild forms of impurity, whereas, on the contrary, this would subjectively endanger the status of a group living in close cohabitation with other groups of similar status.

As in the case of menstruating women, the relation with the gods as necessitating purity is stressed in the village festivals:

> The festival priests are much more important for the festival than ordinary villagers. They dress and worship the idol. Usually one or more of them are oracles of one or other of the deities .... Their duties require their being frequently very near the idols and other representations of the deities they worship. Consequently, they have to be in a condition of great ritual purity. They have to observe more restrictions regarding food and other matters than ordinary villagers.[15] The degree of ritual purity becomes, in this case, an index of the degree of concern in the festival (p. 115).

We find here the same division of labour as in mourning, and our author applies the same concept of "concern". For us it is sufficient to note that the "festival-priests" approach or incarnate the gods and for this reason they are enjoined to observe a higher degree of purity than other villagers who do not come into direct contact with the gods.

To sum up, it appears that, apart from vaguer statements which we may sometimes have to make, only two kinds of statements are permissible as having a precise meaning in these matters:

1) We may say that an object or a person is *purer*, or *less pure* (or, of course, more or less impure) *than* another, as when we say that Brahmans are purer than Coorgs, or birth-soiled clothes more impure than ordinary dirty clothes. (Even in this case the conditions in which the comparison is made should be at least implicit: Brahmans and Coorgs are compared

[15] Here again the parallelism between the Coorgs and the Pramalai Kallar is close, although the latter are much less punctilious, and have in this case no restrictions bearing on ordinary people. "It is remarkable that these notions [of purity and impurity] ... to which, within the group, ordinary people might seem to attach little importance, are found again in all their strength when we deal with people who have to do with the gods" (translated from Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 345).

in their ordinary condition or "normal ritual status", clothes in relation to wearing or washing them).

2) We may also say that a person, or an object, is impure *in relation to* another, as for example when there is avoidance between the two. For instance, the chief mourners after the *māda* ceremony have ceased to be impure in relation to ordinary pursuits and contacts, while they remain impure in relation to the gods, and may not enter a temple. In such statements also we should be careful to take into account the circumstances: it is not enough to say that the washerman is impure in relation to the house; it must be added that this is true for instance when a certain stage has been reached in the marriage preparations.

At first sight, it may seem that in India contact between purity and impurity endangers or affects purity, that impurity is more potent than purity, and that this constitutes a reversal of what happens in simpler societies where the sacred endangers the non-sacred by any but well-regulated contact. It is worthwhile looking into this matter more closely, and in particular, enquiring whether contact has the same effect when it occurs between men and when it occurs between a man and a non-human object, be it a spiritual being or a thing like water. The distinction is made by Stevenson (see below, p. 35).

A paragraph quoted above concerning "normal ritual status" (p. 16) ends with a description of the effect of contact between persons, and it is followed by another which concludes thus: "contact with impurity normally destroys it [purity]" (p. 107). In the context this should be taken as applying to contact between men only. (We know that the Coorgs call *maḍi* not only ritual purity in a man, but also clothes washed by the washerman; it would be interesting to know whether they apply this concept to other objects, and to gods.) On the next page, the author recalls that contact between people of different castes acts in the same way, the high-caste man being defiled and not the low-caste man purified. Here a note is added:

> It is not always that a *maḍi* object becomes defiled when it comes in contact with a *pole*-object: the sprinkling of consecrated water purifies a person or house in a condition of ritual impurity (p. 108).

This note generalizes from men to objects in general, and we see that the principle which governed contact between men does not apply in one case of contact between a man and an object or between two objects. This is seen also in the most common form of purification: if one can

wash off (relative) impurity by bathing, this seems to imply that the purity of the water in which he bathes is more powerful than the impurity he carried. The very economy of the system supposes that the human order (power of pollution, contact prohibited) is reversed in connection with some non-human agencies (power of purity, contact recommended). Let us note by the way that this justifies, on a purely religious level, the "worship" of rivers, or the reverence paid to them by Hindus; what would become of men without them? Now, what are the consequences of contact between impure people and gods? We do not know what would happen in general if impure people were to enter a temple, although it is certainly believed that this would be detrimental to men (although perhaps not, or not only, to the trespassers themselves). We know that the outer parts of a temple served by a Brahman priest have to be purified after animals have been sacrificed there and before the Brahman priest can take up his functions again; but this obviously belongs to another, deeper stratum where the interdependence of pure and impure is recognized and organized (see p. 33). Concerning Untouchables and the village-festival, we read, first in connection with the relations between Coorgs and other castes:

> ... Poleyas may not come out of their huts during the first eighteen days of the biennal festival of the deity Kētrappa at Bēngūr. It is believed that they will suffer some misfortune if they come out and see the festival-priests (*kāvukāras*) going about their sacred work (p. 42).
>
> [concerning cooperation in the village] During the festival of Kētrappa at Bēngūr, the Poleyas may not be seen by any high caste villager till the eighteenth day of the festival, but on the eighteenth evening they march in procession with pipe and drum to the Kētrappa temple and watch the ritual from a nearby knoll (p. 62-63).
>
> [concerning ritual purity in village festivals] (on the eighteenth day in the evening a shot is fired freeing the village from the restrictions in force during the festival) ... no Poleya may leave his hut and show himself to a member of a high caste during the first eighteen days of the festival. They are specially forbidden to show themselves to the festival-priests (*kāvukāras*). The Poleyas are very greatly afraid of Kētrappa, whom they call "big god" ... and it is believed that Kētrappa will punish them if they show themselves to the villagers during the festival (p. 115).

Although the third statement is the most complete, it does not entirely rule out the others, as, for instance, some difference may be found between the deity punishing people and misfortune befalling them.[16] It is clear

[16] It will be noticed that, in order to establish the facts on some points, one is obliged to juxtapose several similar, but not identical, statements made by the author in different places of the book. This is due to the fact that, as often nowadays in anthropo-

anyhow, especially from the context of the last quotation, that there is, in fact, a necessity for keeping impure persons (including menstruating women) away from those persons in the village who have to become pure in connection with the cult to be offered to the gods. In one way or another the sacredness of the gods comes into play and threatens the impurity which would come too close to it. Here, then, there is danger from above and not contagion from below. In the case of contact of a woman in her periods with the cobra-deity, "specially sensitive to defilement", we are told that "the angered cobra-deity may be roused to bite a member [of the family]" (p. 166). Here interpretation is delicate: the deity is conceived as liable to be defiled, but it does not seem that it actually is; it is only angered, and the consequences of contact fall back on men. On the whole, the sacredness of the gods is dangerous for impure people who would approach it (or for their kin). Before approaching gods, men have to become pure, and a number of objects and devices is at their disposal for that purpose. In the widest perspective, then, *purity appears as more potent than impurity; it is only among men that the order is in a way reversed.* We cannot speak of reversal pure and simple, because the consequences of contact are not of the same nature in both cases: in one case they are fraught with danger, while in the other they bring only contagion. Also, we have all along equated purity with sacredness. Are we entitled to do so? This question will be taken up again in the conclusion, but it can already be pointed out that the very distinction of the two kinds of contact situation goes towards distinguishing human purity from non-human sacredness.

Professor Srinivas encounters one difficulty related to contact which

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logical literature, description does not here precede analysis. Instead, each item appears only in the place – more often the places – where it is relevant to the theoretical discussion. There are risks involved in such a procedure. One is that the reader finds it difficult to spot the relevant material, whenever he wants to take up a thread different from the author's: here "shaving", absent from the index, is the object of detailed consideration on p. 79-82, but what happens in this respect at the end of the period of mourning has to be quarried out from pages 112 and 121. Moreover, this method is far more dangerous in the case of students and beginners than it is in the hands of an experienced scholar such as the author of the book under review.

Considering only the Indian field, would it not be commendable, in works of this kind in the future, to have in one place a basic and complete statement of fact, to which subsequent analysis might refer as many times as necessary? It is true that the present conditions of publication often make it difficult. The progress of studies would profit by a method of making the descriptions available to the specialists (by microfilm, card system or otherwise) when it appears finally that they cannot, for practical reasons, be included in the corresponding book. For it would be inconceivable, of course, that the analysis might not bear on a previously written down description.

demands our attention. Mourners offering food to the departed must do it after a bath, with their dripping clothes on, that is, after the same elaborate "purification" which is required before making offerings to the gods. We may make some general remarks. Professor Srinivas speaks of "good-sacred" and "bad-sacred" as of two varieties of sacredness. In section X of Chapter IV (p. 117-119) he examines the relation between certain elements of rites used in auspicious and inauspicious ritual. He points out that there is very often a reversal, as in the well-known example of circumambulation, clockwise in the former case, counterclockwise in the latter, but that there is also identity or something which he calls "confinement", meaning a feature particular or confined to one kind of ritual only. There is nothing strange about "identity". We should expect, while going from "good-sacred" to "bad-sacred", that something remains identical (corresponding to "sacred") as well as that something is reversed ("good" and "bad"). So people circumambulating a temple (in the clockwise direction) as well as a corpse (in the counter-clockwise direction) do it three times. What corresponds to "sacred" here is circumambulating three times. Similarly, rice may be offered in both cases, but it will be white in one case, yellowed with turmeric in the other. Coorgs carry out these distinctions systematically; this is what makes their material so excellent for analysis. We conclude that, for them, there is a good deal in common between "good-sacred" and "bad-sacred".

Professor Srinivas proposes to look at the mourners offering food to the departed, after a bath and with their dripping clothes on (p. 84, 103, 109) in the following way (we italicize parts of the statements to show the progress of interpretation):

> While *pole* and *maḍi* are normally mutually opposed, the mourner who is in a condition of *tike* fulfils *the same preliminary ritual rules as the devotee about to pray* (p. 109).
>
> Mourners making an offering of food to the spirit of the departed person *are in a condition of extreme ritual purity* while they do it, though their general ritual condition till the conclusion of the mourning is *tike*, an extreme form of pollution (p. 103).

and finally:

> ... *within the world* of ritual impurity the mourner attains a form of ritual purity prior to performing the most important rites: in other words he attains *maḍi* in *pole* (p. 109).

This is not easy to admit, for this would be the only case in which purity would be attained within impurity; from what we know one has to get

out of the one in order to get into the other. Also, this would contradict what we know about the condition of the departed as opposed to the ancestor which he becomes at the end of the period of mourning: only then does he become "good-sacred"; until then he is definitely "bad-sacred" just as the mourners are impure. Why then should impure people go to the extreme of becoming pure to make offerings to a "bad-sacred" entity? Should we admit that the Coorgs themselves confuse in their minds the two states of *preta* and *pitṛ*? There is perhaps another way out of the difficulty if we bear in mind that there is something in common between the two varieties of sacredness which opposes both of them to ordinary human states. It is possible to think that to approach "bad-sacredness" requires the same preparations as to approach "good-sacredness". How does the ritual bath work? We know that it works on analogy with cleaning physical dirt (cleaning and cleansing). We know also that it does not work mechanically or by some purely magical power inherent in water, but through the presence or the association of some spiritual power. This is clear in the case of sacred rivers and tanks; it could be shown to be true more widely (cf. below p. 52). More generally, bathing links up with the general notion of separation; it provides an answer to the question: how can one and the same person participate in states or conditions which have to remain separate? Through bathing, a *separation*[17] is realized between different successive states of a person; it serves to mark off more precisely two sorts of states which are not only incompatible with each other, but which have also to remain apart from the ordinary or neutral condition. In this way, while being ordinarily neither pure nor impure, when necessary one can become pure for a time, or keep the inevitable impurity within bounds. It may be that in some cases bathing is resorted to, not only at the end, but also at the beginning of a state of impurity.[18] To return to the mourners, they bathe in a thorough way because the state of the human being (be it *tīke*) has to be kept separate from sacredness (be it that of gods or ghosts). This bath means that they approach the sacred; it does not mean that they approach positive, and not negative, sacredness. It is not an index of purity, but of separation from human states. Moreover, through his very offerings to the ghost the mourner becomes impure, and this is most probably why death impurity is the most extreme: because a link has to be maintained for a number of days with the source of impurity.

[17] Marcel Mauss, "Sin and Expiation in the Pacific" (from auditors' notes).

[18] Among the Pramalai Kallar, at the beginning of a girl's puberty or when the hair (of a child) is dedicated to a god (Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 237, 243).

We shall now briefly sum up the Hindu situation as exemplified by the Coorgs, comparing it to others, and attempting to express it in general terms. The contrast with Polynesia is striking. There, no distinction is made between the holy and the unclean; they are both sacred and forbidden, i.e. *tapu*. The principle of this unity of the two opposites lies in their relation to the non-sacred, in the danger with which they threaten it. Touching the chief's head and touching a corpse are both dangerous, and taboo, for the ordinary man. The sacred is left undifferentiated in its opposition to the profane. In India, at first sight, it seems that the major opposition lies within the sacred, between pure and impure, holy and unclean, while the profane is scarcely recognized at all; although we tried to track it down, we found only a sort of shadowy region halfway between the extremes of purity and impurity, a kind of neutral condition not expressed as such in the language. Although people live in this condition most of the time, it is considered only in relation to the two poles of sacredness, either as mild impurity whose contact can pollute purity, or as mild purity which can be polluted by contact with impurity. At this point one may be tempted to see in the Polynesian type of system a necessary logical and genetical prerequisite for the establishment of a system of the Indian type. The sacred must have been opposed to the non-sacred before it could have been differentiated into pure and impure. Moreover, an important novelty appears in India, with the impure polluting the pure. It remains to be seen how these differences can be correlated with differences in social organization, and here again the evolutionary perspective might seem for once not so unreasonable: the Polynesian type of situation, where the king is at the same time the chief priest, is widespread, while the Indian situation where the king is a relatively profane being and the priest takes the first place in the hierarchy, is unique.

Actually, this is too simple a picture. Many of the concepts used in it have to be revised, as the reader may have noticed from the foregoing discussion of the Coorgs' usages and ideas. To begin with Polynesia, Steiner insists that the word *noa*, the opposite of *tapu* in Polynesian language, is wrongly translated as "profane" (*op. cit.*, Index, *s.v.*). He says that the relation between the two terms is one of mutual exclusiveness: *noa* is what is not under *tapu*, what has been freed from *tapu*, what is free and common (like the Hebrew *chol*, but with the important difference that the latter may empirically, if not conceptually, comprehend the unclean) (p. 83). Steiner recommends us to think of *tapu* and *noa* respectively as "tied" and "untied". This Mauss often did, and he also

had some hesitation in translating *noa* as "profane".[19] Steiner's point seems to be that *noa* does not denote a realm of non-sacred entities, but only more specifically the fact of the release from, or the absence of, *tapu*. This brings us nearer to the Indian case and the difficulty we experienced there in attempting to find the "profane" conceptualized. In both cases we are perhaps making the common mistake of superimposing our own ideas on those of the people we study. Still we are probably coming nearer to the mark when we insist on the relativity of these notions, and when we see in them not dichotomous classifications of things, but ideal oppositions. The question remains whether we can see in Polynesia an opposition between sacred and profane or non-sacred.

We find that the basic attitude towards death, birth, etc. is the same in India as elsewhere, and is based, at least in the case of death, on similar ideas. But what is danger elsewhere is impurity here. Moreover, there are specialized agents who take upon themselves this impurity, and this is connected with the fact that the social order is based on the separation between pure and impure considered as permanently attached to groups of people. In the cosmic order the Indian situation is the same as the common one, in which sacredness is potently dangerous for the profane coming into contact with it (except in well-defined situations, with elaborate preparations and precautions which make the contact with sacredness beneficial). While, then, in the cosmic order the Indian situation can be described in the most general terms of sacredness and non-sacredness, it is quite different, and specific, in the human order: in this restricted realm, we find, not sacredness and non-sacredness, but purity and impurity, and the opposition between these latter two is segmented. Contact is uniformly prohibited between segments located at a certain distance from each other; contact is not dangerous for the lower level, but results in contagion of the higher level. In this limited sense, impurity is more powerful than purity, but contact here loses something of its religious character: it does not bring misfortune, or disease, but only social degradation. To sum up, the Indian system does not consist in the substitution of purity-impurity to sacred-profane, but only in the presence, within the general framework provided by the latter opposition, of a restricted sphere governed by the former. This sphere is that of human relations, which in some way becomes separated from the rest and, although the principle of its organization is religious, subtly secularized within the all-embracing religious framework. This con-

[19] In the unpublished lectures already referred to.

clusion may appear paradoxical and startling in comparison with what we know of the absence of solid distinctions between human and other beings, be they gods or animals. Still, it has been arrived at by a close scrutiny of the evidence, and it fits in with the general tone of the social order.

This has one important consequence: if it is true, then purity and impurity are restricted to the human sphere; they cannot be equated with sacredness, positive or negative, which belongs to a wider sphere. Purity and impurity appear as human correspondents of these, or perhaps human modalities of them: I have to become pure to approach the gods, and even if I come in contact with them, this does not mean that their nature is purity, but only that purity is a condition for the contact with them to be beneficial to me (or other men or human things). We are told about purity, i.e. about the *means* of contact, not about the nature of the *object* of contact, the sacred. This is a ritualistic outlook quite in keeping with the supremacy of the priests. To strengthen our hypothesis the articulation of human and non-human spheres should certainly be studied in more detail than we have done, but it seems that the difficulty encountered over the offerings to the departed, taken as an instance, comes into place here. The mourner, impure as he is, has to bathe to come into contact with negative sacredness, as one has to do for positive sacredness. The human order has its ends far apart from each other; they meet in the universe; the sacred is split into two only in relation to us. Purity and impurity denote our relations to it.

We are now in a better position to criticize Professor Srinivas' chapter on *mangala* and propose an alternative view of the marriage ceremonies. In South India there are auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies, and marriage is the typical auspicious ceremony. Among the Coorgs, the ceremony of *mangala* is an auspicious ritual, nowadays restricted to marriage, whereas in the past it was performed on other occasions as well. The analysis of *mangala* can be taken as an attempt to account for the auspiciousness of the ritual in terms of social organization: the core of the *mangala*, or *mūrta*, would consist of "solidarity rites". There is an interesting and laudable attempt to study every element of the ritual (actually mainly material objects) in its other uses, in order to arrive, by comparison, at its symbolic meaning. This is done in terms of "ritual value", which often means little more than the (reified) use of the object in rites. It is not possible here to discuss this chapter in detail; only a few remarks can be made. On the whole, the attempt is not convincing.

Why? First, one starts from the parts instead of the whole: *mangala* is torn out of its context and its detail is forced into insufficient Radcliffe-Brownian categories, while no advantage is taken of the general knowledge available on the matter. This will be shown briefly below. More generally, it should be stated that there are things which a monographic study cannot do. With the help of general knowledge, i.e. comparison outside India, it can show the relation between social organization and the outline, or some basic features, of a ceremony such as, for instance, marriage. But it cannot exhaust the symbolic content of its minute details. Here is a sort of language which is common to many groups and cannot be learnt from any single one. In this case, one is not dealing only with marriage and its place in the society, but with Hindu ways of showing reverence, and of behaving in general towards gods and other beings or things. These ways of acting cannot but appear quite arbitrary if referred only to the social organization of the Coorgs. They are part of Hindu religious behaviour and their analysis, difficult as it is, has to be done on quite a different level, on which comparison between different Hindu groups is a necessary condition. Here we should guard ourselves against a narrow sociological determinism.

Rice is sprinkled into the well in the Ganga puja (p. 91); in *mangala* it is sprinkled on two lamps, and, it seems, towards the sun-god, and on the bridegroom (p. 74). Unfortunately the author does not conclude that the bridegroom is the object of something like worship – a conclusion which would be in keeping with Hindu marriage in general – but speaks only of salutation and "solidarity rite" (p. 92). The concept of "solidarity" is used in such an extended sense as to detract seriously from its usefulness, whereas a more restricted use would have allowed our author to benefit from a general theory – as by chance there is one – in the matter. He defines excellently the nature of *mangala* in general:

> Every *mangala* marks a change in the social personality of the subject: he moves from one position in the status system to another (p. 93).

The theory of this was done by Van Gennep in a book whose title has become the name of these ceremonies: *Les Rites de passage*.[20] It is not enough to say, as Srinivas does, that "On such an occasion the group concerned performs towards him [the subject] a series of solidarity rites" (*ibid.*), for, from Van Gennep, we expect to find in the first place "separation rites" (in relation to the initial "position" of the subject), in the second only "aggregation rites" (in relation to the second position), and

[20] Arnold Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage* (Paris, 1909).

in between the two a "marginal state" marked by insecurity (cf. the common South Indian idea that the bride and groom have to be protected from the evil-eye). Actually separation and aggregation are expressed in the Coorg marriage in a procedure which unfortunately, because of its legal nature, Srinivas describes in another part of the book (Chapter V). This is only the general schema of the "rites de passage" relevant to an analysis in terms of "solidarity rites", but there is no doubt that in Hindu India marriage takes on quite specific and remarkable features.

In particular, we can ask ourselves whether the auspiciousness of marriage is really as foreign to the basic ideas of purity and impurity as an analysis in terms of solidarity would lead us to believe. We are told that there is a correspondence between the pure and impure states through which an individual passes in his life and the status of the upper and lower castes respectively. After a death, the condition of members of the family is similar to that of low caste people. It is remarkable that marriage is one of the rare "rites de passage" in which, unlike birth, girls' puberty or death, no impurity is involved; accordingly it is the most auspicious ceremony. It is possible, then, to suppose that the condition of the bride and groom in marriage is similar to that of people of a superior caste. And some well-known facts support this views. We know that the bridegroom for instance is ritually shaved and bathed and puts on pure clothes. He is purified before the *mūrta* takes place. Speaking of Hindu India in general, he is the object of some sort of "worship". It would be better not to use such a term, pending analysis, but we may say that the honours paid to the bridal pair on the occasion show that they are temporarily lifted out of their ordinary condition. Sometimes the bridegroom is compared to the king, sometimes the bridal pair is identified with a divine couple.[21] It is probable, therefore, that the sacredness, for the approach to which bride and groom are purified, resides in marriage itself, even where no brahmanical ceremony is gone through.

Professor Srinivas shows in great detail the different forms which the interdependence between castes, high and low, takes in the festivities. On the other hand, he points repeatedly to the "ambivalence" or the "inconsistencies" in the religious beliefs and practices of the Coorgs. One may wonder whether there is not a relation between the two phenomena, namely, whether the apparent "inconsistencies" in religion are not rooted in the recognition or valuation of the interdependence, or,

[21] Here the high price commonly paid for marriage and the prestige attached to it are understandable. For some details and references, see Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

in other words, whether "ambivalence" here is not interiorized interdependence. This aspect has already been referred to in these pages in connection with caste hierarchy and power relations (*Contr.* II. p. 54-55), but a few quotations will help to stress the fact once again. The most remarkable situation is found in an apparent reversal of caste values as represented by two men, a Brahman – vegetarian, pure, and a Coorg – meat-eater and animal sacrificer, impure, when, in a village festival, the Coorg oracle possessed by the goddess Bhadrakali, his head covered with (his own) blood, is approached by the Brahman priest of the deity:

> There was a look of fear on the priest's face when he was requesting the deity (the oracle) to leave the village without harming anyone. But though the oracle is identified with Bhadrakāḷi, he does not enter the innermost room where Bhadrakāḷi's image is kept .... That is to say, the implications of the identification of the oracle with Bhadrakāḷi are not fully worked out. Only the priest may go into the innermost room, and this rule is not relaxed in favour of the oracle who is temporarily identified with Bhadrakāḷi (p. 195).

One is tempted to ask: Why is it that the implications are not fully worked out? Two other passages, although more general in character, are equally forceful:

> Coorgs express the dietetic preference of their deities by saying that they "lost their caste" (p. 211).
>
> [Not only among Coorgs but] All over India Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic customs, often involving beliefs regarded as mutually inconsistent, are found existing together (p. 166).

The importance of these statements cannot be over-estimated; such statements will have to be made everywhere in India when the living religion of non-Brahmans is carefully observed. It will be noticed that, in the last quotation, "Sanskritic" and "non-Sanskritic" are used to generalize about vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings (to ancestors). Then we note that in all three quotations the opposition between vegetarian and non-vegetarian diet is involved. The second quotation most emphatically calls for re-examination of the very notion of belief itself. It is regrettable that the author did not take up this amazing situation as a sociological question. The beginning of an answer can be briefly suggested.[22] The three quotations show that belief, including belief in gods, is only relative and subject to an overriding belief in the necessary co-existence of opposites, in the complementary relationship of pure and impure. The religion of gods is secondary; the religion of caste is fundamental. What confronts us here is probably the corner-stone of

[22] The question appears also in the Appendix, p. 75.

social as well as religious consciousness, the very root of the universal relativity which had to be stressed, here itself, again and again. The interdependence of high and low is not only observable in behaviour; it is also interiorized as the fundamental belief.[23]

H. N. C. STEVENSON, "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System" (Curl Bequest Prize Essay, 1953), *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, London, Vol. 84, 1954, p. 45-65.

This very interesting essay contains a well-classified and useful catalogue of everything the author has found in the literature of caste in relation to what he also calls "ritual status". He has succeeded in bringing forth unnoticed regularities and problems. We propose to discuss only a few points which bear some relation to the above discussion. First of all, we are reminded of the importance of food (and sex as well) in the relations between castes. The study of the Coorgs is not primarily concerned with relations between castes, and therefore we read little about this. However, even from the point of view of the changes in the relative level of purity of one individual person, we should remember the elaborate rules concerning the preparation and consumption of food, such as, for instance, the fact that, widely enough in India, one has to bathe before sitting down to a meal.

In general, Mr. Stevenson makes two valuable points. In connection precisely with Professor Srinivas's book he distinguishes, as we have done above, contacts between men from other contacts (p. 50). Then he classifies pollution into permanent and temporary, but this is not done exactly from the same point of view as above:

As a permanent attribute pollution is an inherent characteristic of the relationship between social groups of various categories; between man and the phenomena of the natural world; and between these phenomena themselves. It is the degree of permanent purity or pollution, which fixes group ritual status, that orders inter-group behaviour and attitudes (...). It is an attribute of various parts of the body (...). It is an attribute of material objects (...). It is an attribute of the vegetable world (...), of the animal world (...), of all forms of bodily emissions (...). Finally it is an attribute of death and decay ... (p. 50-51).

To attempt to get at the core of the statement, we give only the skeleton of the development. This seems to be that everything in the world is classified and put into a hierarchy according to its relative (permanent)

[23] Further consideration of Professor Srinivas's work is taken up on p. 40 below.

degree of purity. In our foregoing discussion we stressed the importance of recognizing this fact as far as men are concerned, so the question is: is it profitable to generalize this recognition to all sorts of beings and objects? There is, no doubt, an Indian tendency to do this. Our author takes objects to be substances which have a certain degree of purity as their attribute: "silk has a higher ritual purity than cotton, gold a higher ritual purity than silver, or brass, or iron, or earthenware".[1] In our view, as far as such a classification exists in the minds of the people, it is a secondary rationalization of ideas whose roots are to be found in the concrete relations of the respective objects to man. It is as cloth that silk is purer than cotton, in connection with people wearing it, or a brass vessel is purer than an earthenware one, in connection with its use for drinking, cooking, etc., or again, if animals are classified according to their feeding habits, it is done first of all in relation to the possible use of their flesh as food by men. Of course we can trust pandits and shastras to go very far along such promising lines of classification. But this should not blind us to the fact that what is fundamental here is the relation of the object to man, mostly as a specific use of it by him. Purity, more than an "attribute" of things, is an index of their relation to man. Although our author attempted to begin his discussion with "relationships", here he is reifying.[2] This is not all, and there is ample scope for study. It is true, as our author suggests, that the difference between a brass vessel and a clay vessel seems to lie primarily in their physical quality: the former can be cleaned, and hence cleansed, while the latter, owing to its porous quality, cannot. But what about a gold vessel as compared to a silver one, or a silk cloth as compared to a cotton one? (In the first case, it is probable that the difference is one in auspiciousness more than in purity.) Here there is a relation to the price of the material, and the social reference is obvious: what is costly is *ipso facto* higher; wealth is a blessing. Not only should auspiciousness and purity be distinguished from each other (although they can merge, as in the case of the silk cloth), but also from sacredness, as of the water of a ritual bath.

We beg to differ with Mr. Stevenson on another point. In distinguishing

[1] These statements are accompanied by references and could be taken as shorthand notes referring to more specific and relational statements. But in actual fact this is not the case; rather, the whole development appears as a catalogue of objects considered as having by themselves a permanent "ritual status".

[2] The result is to make Indian representations appear more rigid than they are in fact, and to idealize them, which might seem strange in an author whose behaviouristic and even materialistic leanings are otherwise in evidence in the same essay (see below and *Contr.*, II, p. 53-54).

pollution into external and internal, he argues that the latter is more serious than the former, and finds in this one reason for the intensity of pollution through food (p. 56 sq.). Roughly, the idea is that while mere bodily (external) contact with a lower caste man results only in mild pollution, accepting food from him conveys a much more severe pollution because food is absorbed (internally). There is certainly some truth in the statement, but it is incomplete. Religious ideas cannot be reduced to our apparently immediate distinctions. There is no short cut from other people's behaviour to our own ideas; we must first look at people's behaviour in terms of their thought. Comparison can help, as similar notions are found in other parts of the world. First, the author notes rightly that in general it is the specific use of an object by an impure person – the wearing of a cloth, the use of a pot for drinking and cooking – and not the mere touching of it, that pollutes it seriously. There is no necessity here for introducing mechanical or physical notions. What is in question, more probably, is the notion of appropriation of the object; when a man uses an object it becomes a part of him, participates in him. Then, no doubt, this appropriation is much closer in the case of food, and the point is that appropriation precedes absorption, as it accompanies the cooking. Cooking may be taken to imply a complete appropriation of the food by the household. It is almost as if, before being "internally absorbed" by the individual, food was, by cooking, collectively pre-digested. One cannot share the food prepared by people without sharing in their nature. This is one aspect of the situation. Another is that cooked food is extremely permeable to pollution. Parallels from Polynesia have been adduced, and the similarity is much more thorough than appears from casual references. There, it would appear that cooking means not only appropriating, but also depriving the food of its own life or essence, that is, making it at the same time human, and defenceless.[3]

Regarding India, we have to be tentative, because the whole complex has not been completely investigated, and still less, analysed. But we do know that in some cases the food has to be desacralized before it can be eaten, by a part of it being offered in the fire of the hearth or in some other way. We know also that the kitchen is sacred, probably the basic sacred place of the house; and we can surmise that the ancestors are

[3] The point cannot be elaborated here. It is taken from the already mentioned lectures by Mauss, quoting from Fornander, Ellis, Elsdon Best, etc. The condition of food, already cooked, but not yet eaten, would seem to be analogous to the "marginal state" of a person in a "rite de passage" between one condition and another, with its attendant dangers. Food passes from the non-human to the human world as does man in birth, and initiation.

present in it,[4] implicitly if not explicitly. Finally, we know that cooking is no ordinary action. To quote once again from the Coorgs:

> The kitchen is sacred as food is cooked there: food ought to be cooked in a pure place and care is taken to see that impure persons and objects do not get into the kitchen. Sometimes the periodical offerings of food to dead ancestors, which are made in every Coorg house, are made in the kitchen alone instead of in the ancestor-shrine or anywhere else (Srinivas, *op. cit.*, p. 76-77).

On the whole, if it is part of the definition of food that it is eaten, this does not explain all the ideas and practices connected with it. The same sort of argument could be applied to other cases of "internal" pollution; the social context has to be taken into account.

To conclude, whether it concerns food, mourning and marriage, purity and impurity, we cannot do without some general knowledge. Without a comparative background we cannot go beyond a rough description of people's actions and utterings; we cannot relate these with one another and obtain a simpler picture. *A fortiori* we cannot pretend to lay bare the symbolic content of the data by applying to them our mechanistic views about the human body or the social body. On the contrary, the moment we can take advantage of what is known elsewhere to disregard, as far as possible,[5] the preconceptions of our own common sense and come closer to the people's thought and action, we realize at one and the same time to what extent they are like others (and hence not to be immediately related to their particular organization) and to what extent, on this common basis, an original construction has been built. This specific Indian development can then be easily related to the specific Indian society, as we have seen in the case of marriage.

Any description is made in terms of the general knowledge of the period and of the author, and in turn contributes to it. This double relation accounts for the apparently slow rate of progress in these studies. Radcliffe-Brown oversimplified the process when he imagined that a stage of accumulating monographic descriptions would be followed by a stage of drawing a systematic and definitive typology. This is true in the field of social organization, and much more so in that of religion.

[4] "basic sacred place": what is meant is that there are cases in which there is no other. It looks otherwise when the sacred entities have a separate seat (see above p. 22). The statement is made as a pointer, in the face of apparent contradictions; knowledge is scanty and there is room for differences (type of family, etc.). About ancestors, cf. the mention of lineage spirits in Stevenson (p. 53).

[5] It is possible only to a certain extent at a given time; the extent depends on the previous progress in knowledge (not the mere accumulation of data).

Regarding the latter, the kind of short-cut he recommended does not only preclude a real understanding, it is also, after all, overbearingly self-sufficient with regard to the peoples we study. We are not trying to find regularities in their presumed "superstitions"; we are busy learning from them about mankind, i.e. in a sense about ourselves. Only during the last few decades has this been done more systematically or consciously, and it requires more time and effort than is often imagined.

ON THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OR LEVELS IN HINDIUSM

M. N. Srinivas, *Coorgs* (cf. p. 9). McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization", Part III, Festivals and Deities, in *Village India*, p. 191-218 (cf. *Contributions*, I, p. 23).

The relation between Coorg religion and Hinduism is certainly an important question in Professor Srinivas' view. His treatment of this theme can be summed up as follows. He starts by studying Coorg religion in relation to the group, without reference to Hinduism, although he occasionally mentions the fact that a given feature is not special to the Coorgs, but is general either in the region, or more widely in South India, or even in All-India.[1] Then, at a certain point, he finds that Coorg conceptions or beliefs are developed into conceptions and beliefs which are shared by all Hindus in a given area. Through this "ritual idiom" Coorgs are united with Hindus in general. It would seem that Coorgs are conscious of being Hindus when they worship deities which they know to be Hindu, or to be worshipped by other, Hindu, people. Thus, in one place we are shown the sacred character of the domestic lamp and of the kitchen stove in terms of the solidarity and protective power of the family (p. 89-90). Then:

> The ritual attitude prevalent towards the domestic lamp is easily extended to fire generally, and to the sun. These again provide points of contact with Sanskritic or All-India Hinduism (p. 89).
>
> The domestic lamp led to a consideration of the kitchen-stove, and this in turn led to a consideration of the fire generally and the sun. In Sanskritic or All-India Hinduism, Agni is the god of fire and is related to Sāvitār or Sūrya the sun-god .... The local phenomenon of the attribution of sacredness to the domestic lamp and kitchen stove is absorbed into the All-India worship of

[1] Hence the terms "regional Hinduism", "South Indian Hinduism", "All-India Hinduism", which should not be taken to mean that there are really different kinds of Hinduism, but only one in all its regional variety.

Agni and Sūrya.* Coorgs are drawn into the All-India ritual idiom which is mainly Sanskritic in character (p. 90-91).

* It may be argued, however, that the attribution of sacredness to the domestic lamp and stove is derived from the worship of Agni and Sūrya, and not vice-versa. [M. N. S.].

But why, one may ask, should one thing be "derived" from the other? The passage is not a very fortunate one, but the statement we have to consider is that "the local phenomenon of the attribution of sacredness to the domestic lamp ... is absorbed into the All-India worship...". It can be understood in two ways, according to the meaning one gives to the word "local". Either the lamp is sacred only for the Coorgs, while Agni is a Hindu god. But in fact the lamp is sacred for other Hindus, and also, it is not enough that Agni is Hindu; the Coorgs must know he is, for otherwise there would presumably be no "All India ritual idiom". Or, we must interpret otherwise: as the lamp is a domestic thing, the Coorgs think that its sacredness is particular to them, or to their region, while they know that Agni, being Sanskritic, is all-Indian. And so they become conscious of being Hindus through Agni and not through the lamp. (But surely it is otherwise for the observer?). Now, about Sūrya and Yama as associated with points of the compass we are told:

Coorgs worship these two deities along with other Hindus all over India. The possession of common values binds people together and Coorgs form a single community with Hindus all over India when they worship the same deities (p. 79).

Here one might add: whether they know it or not. No doubt now the observer, and even the follower of Radcliffe-Brown, is speaking: the fact of worshipping the same object, whether or not they are conscious of doing so, binds people together. If this is so, then it is possible to stress the fact that the Coorgs have much more in common with all Hindus than we are told here: they have the domestic lamp, the kitchen stove, a certain idea of space and the cardinal points. They also have a social order in common, purity and impurity, and Brahmans. Does this not bind them together with all Hindus? The examples could be multiplied. When Coorgs go and bathe in the source of the sacred Kaveri river, they are certainly aware of participating in a common regional ritual, as they can presumably see other people from other places doing the same. It will be readily admitted that from a subjective point of view something of the kind our author has in mind actually happens; it may be that while saluting the domestic lamp, etc., Coorgs are not conscious of being Hindus and that they are made conscious of it in other circumstances,

like bathing in the Kaveri. But, from an objective point of view, the matter is quite different, and the question can even be reversed: *what is there among Coorgs that is not Hindu*? Nothing, because the Coorgs are Hindus. And they are Hindus essentially because they adhere to Hindu values. It is true that we read:

> The caste system has enabled a vast number of tiny groups with distinct cultures, occupations, and systems of beliefs to live side by side, the autonomy of each being respected while at the same time co-operation was ensured between them (p. 212).

With this it is impossible to agree. For such a statement not to be mere speculation or "conjectural history" rightly discarded by Radcliffe-Brown, it would be necessary to show that such "tiny groups" with distinct "systems of beliefs" are actually found within Hinduism, and this has never been done. What is possible is that such groups have become integrated into Hinduism by actually modifying their values, and, if not all their particular beliefs, at least certainly their "system of beliefs". For it is a fact that two different systems of beliefs cannot at present be distinguished, from one end of the sub-continent to the other, among Hindu people. Also, what does "autonomy" mean in the above statement? In what sense can Untouchables be said to be subject only to their own laws? Another passage is less ambitious, as it speaks of "a certain amount of cultural and ritual autonomy" (p. 219).

To return to the relation between Coorg religion and Hinduism, it seems that our author was confronted with the basic methodological problem of our studies: how to use the monographic method and study the interrelation of features within a given group as if it were a distinct society, while it is evident that its basic values are shared all over the country? We should remember that Professor Srinivas was the first in the field, and that Radcliffe-Brownian theory was perhaps not best calculated to help him on this point. The problem has already been indicated in these pages[2] and a radical solution has been suggested: the Coorgs are one particular kind of Hindu, and the same is true of all other Hindu groups. Accordingly, they have to be studied as Hindus. In the first place, it is Hinduism that can be studied through them, in their particular variety of it. In other words, there is an advantage in setting the monographic study in a comparative context. Then, it is likely to bring forth some of the relations constitutive of Hinduism.

There is another point involved which concerns the different levels

[2] *Contributions*, I, p. 9-10, 13-14.

which can be distinguished in Hinduism: literary and customary, upper and lower, etc. Many distinctions can be drawn which are not equivalent, although they overlap to a great extent. The author equates what he calls sanskritic Hinduism with (all-India) Hinduism: "Sanskritic Hinduism is Hinduism which transcends provincial barriers and is common to the whole of India" (p. 75).[3] Indeed, this has been commonly admitted for a long time. According to this view, Hindus would be Hindus only through the literary tradition embodied in the sacred books. Save for the exclusiveness of the statement, it is true that the texts have a great importance and a central role. First of all, revelation is deposited in them; they, and they alone, have a transcendental sanction. They alone contain the principle of anything approaching an orthodoxy. On the other hand, it is possible to think, and we are attempting to demonstrate it here, that there are important pan-Indian features which are not stressed or even found in the books, and, still more, that Hinduism is easier to define, as a set of relations or structures, on the non-literate level. That the unity of Hindu India, social as well as religious, is incompletely expressed in the literature, should not be so surprising if one thinks of the particular place, or function, of the literature in the whole. One historical reason for this is already obvious: we are referred to the Vedas as sacred scriptures by a religion which is fundamentally different from vedic religion. Here, as above, it can be said that the religious literature in sanskrit makes people feel the unity of Hinduism, while in actual fact this unity is wider.

In connection with village studies, we have already referred to an article in which McKim Marriott deals with the same problems in a slightly different language. His formulas show a progress in understanding. He speaks of the "little community" and the "greater community". To quote him again:

> The traditional social structure of the greater community of India similarly cannot be understood as apart from its continuing existence in relation to hundreds of thousands of little communities. Both little communities and greater communities are mutually necessary conditions of each other's existence in their present forms. One must consider both in order thoroughly to understand either (p. 191).

One cannot but agree with the broad meaning of this statement. But if one must consider both "communities", surely the point is that they

[3] A more cautious statement is also found: "All India ritual idiom... is mainly Sanskritic in character" (quoted above, p. 41, line 1).

cannot be considered empirically in the same way. In the first place, the whole direct experience of the social anthropologist, and hence his immediate and necessary, if preliminary, understanding, is in some way bound up with one sort or another of "little" community. Turning at this point to the study of festivals and deities in Kishan Garhi (p. 191-218), Marriott goes over from "communities" to "traditions", and opposes the great and the little tradition. What does "tradition" mean? Surely it has cultural, rather than sociological, implications; it is doubtful whether there is a "little" tradition in the same sense as there is a "greater" tradition, and whether exactly the same relations hold between them and between the corresponding "communities". This doubt is immediately strengthened when the author engages in making a catalogue of festivals "as products of great and little tradition", here the "little tradition" is a residual category, as it is constituted only by such festivals as are not found elsewhere.[4] Actually, to correspond to the "little community", the "little tradition" should be taken as embracing all the festivals of Kishan Garhi, for surely phenomena like caste are not excluded from the concept of the "little community" on the ground of their being pan-Indian features? In this matter as in others, the "great tradition" gives us a list of items while the "little community" alone presents a whole of festivals. Only in Kishan Garhi, or among the Coorgs, etc., can the relations between the festivals be studied. Only there can the festivals be seen in their social context, as Srinivas has begun to do. All these advantages are lost once the religion in the village is studied merely as a "tradition" similar to that embodied in sanskrit and other writings. The existence of two levels does not preclude the fruitfulness of an intensive study; only, it cannot be assumed that the relations, as well as the individual features, are particular to the group studied, but rather the reverse.

Marriott then writes of "universalization" and "parochialization". These are convenient expressions for studying the diachronic interaction or interplay of the two levels, local and general, or, popular and scholarly.[5] This study recalls the best studies done in European folklore in which the two levels are taken as heterogeneous. But, rightly or wrongly, it appears possible to do more than this in India, namely, to demonstrate the homogeneity of the two levels and to extend to both (a part of) the relations discovered on the popular level. Paradoxically, when the author engages on a different course, he seems to throw overboard the blessings implied in the expression he used in his title, that of an *indigenous*

[4] As to the "conceptual separability" of the two traditions, see *Contributions*, I, p. 40.
[5] *Contributions*, I, p. 15 and note 18.

civilization. This happily conveyed the feeling one has of dealing with two levels infinitely closer to each other than are in Europe, say, traditional peasant life and industrial technology.

If there is some homogeneity between popular practice and literary disquisitions, and if the basic principles of Hinduism are not all found in its sacred books, then, the difficulties faced by both our authors when they discuss "sanskritization" and its slowness,[6] etc., can be explained away very simply: "sanskritization" does not consist in the imposition of a different system upon an old one, but in the acceptance of a more distinguished or prestigious way of saying the same things. Whether, as a further step, something general can be said about the differences between practice and literature is a question which cannot be discussed here.

The following book will give an example of the difficulties encountered in the study of literary evidence.

Carl Gustav Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose. Studies in Rites and Rituals in South India*. Lund, Gleerup, 1956. 395 p., bibl., 2 indexes.

In the strict sense this is not a sociological work. It is not a monograph on a specific group of people in which religion is studied in relation to other aspects of social life as is the case for the Coorgs. But precisely because of this it allows us to widen the field of comparison of methods and attitudes to which this issue is devoted.

Diehl's work commends itself to our attention for two reasons. On the one hand, it contains a vast quantity of material otherwise difficult of access since it comes from ritual literature in Tamil. On the other hand, the data are discussed in the light of a theoretic schema that, as we shall see, owes much to anthropology and sociology. For example, the much discussed question of the relations between magic and religion is taken up in relation to the scrutiny of an imposing mass of facts. On the whole, the work offers itself as a tentative analysis bearing principally upon the written tradition (if not exclusively the sanskritic), or upon the higher level of religion – the religion of the Brahmans.[1]

The author's occupation is another reason for our interest in the book. The best regional descriptions of religion in India have come from a long

[6] In a different sense, all Hindus are "sanskritic" from the start (see above, p. 34).
[1] These two criteria do not necessarily coincide.

line of missionaries. The names of Dubois, Ziegenbalg, Caldwell, Whitehead, Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson serve to remind us of this fact. In this series we can observe a progress in precision and objectivity due most probably to the influence of ethnology and the science of religions. The present author is the latest of a line of missionaries who have contributed not only to western knowledge of Indian religion, but also to the beginnings of its scientific description. He tells us that he has been acquainted with popular Hinduism for more than twenty years. His description and analysis are perfectly objective.[2] He has studied the science of religions and in turn makes his contribution to it. Under these circumstances it is historically characteristic that while the author has thought that some reflection on methods and some analysis are necessary, yet he has not taken advantage of a sociological description *stricto sensu.*

This being so, it is best to reserve, as far as possible, our sociological claims and see what can be learned from our author's approach to literary evidence, and from the theory he introduces. In fact, most of the book is devoted to a detailed catalogue of Tamil ritual from the literature (p. 36-334). The theoretical framework is found in the Introduction and Conclusion (p. 15-35; 335-369). At the end of each chapter the material is briefly discussed in terms of the concepts posited in the Introduction.

The Introduction mainly discusses the difficulty of distinguishing between magic and religion; it is full of very apposite and sensitive remarks. The author proposes a definition of rites centering on the concept of "instrument" as meaning

> all acts, actions, modes of behaviour and performances which satisfy the two demands of being expressions of an attitude of expectancy and of serving a purpose, with a third condition *sine qua non*, namely that they have an indirect effect. They are not tools for man's own power, they always imply a third factor whether it is conceived as a personal being, or a power, or not conceived at all but simply implied (p. 24).

This definition aims at avoiding separate definitions of magic and religion, as well as any value judgement, while distinguishing between what is religious – in the widest sense, including magic – and what is not. "Indirect" effect seems to be opposed to "direct" effect as sometimes supernatural to natural, or non-empirical to empirical, but the opposition

[2] The anxiety to avoid even in vocabulary the slightest appearance of a value judgement might even seem excessive. For example, the fact that "the stigma of low valuation seems to be inextricable from magic" is given as an argument for rejecting the use of this term (p. 13).

is intended to be wider and "neutral". The same is true of the "third factor". We must confess that we feel there is something obscure in this definition, and that subsequent developments and discussions do not entirely, for us, remove this obscurity. At the same time, the definition succeeds in catching something which is essential, perhaps the "irrationality" of religious action, and it succeeds in avoiding the misconception of magic as working "automatically", or "mechanically".

One cannot but agree with the author about the difficulty of distinguishing between magic and religion, a subject which he discusses at length and with abundant references. But the words "rites and rituals", as well as the expression "magico-religious", are precisely free from this distinction. The word "instrument" is taken over from Marett (p. 28) but used in a wider sense. As shown in the title, it is connected with "purpose", the introduction of which is no doubt legitimate in order to emphasize the fact that rites, or at least some of them, are purposeful actions. The difficulty of the definition is probably connected with the fact that the meaning of "instrument" is made very abstract in two successive stages, first by being applied, not to a tool, but to the action itself,[3] and in the second place by being restricted to one kind of action only, that having an "indirect effect". In turn, the expression "indirect effect" seems to be an equivalent of what has sometimes been called "irrational" action.[4] Our author has noticed that the irrationality of ritual action is connected with the belief in something, in a "third factor", and this is why he speaks of "indirect" effect. But perhaps the notion of "indirect" effect is clear only in the case in which the purpose is empirical; then, the third factor appears as a spiritual element linking the (empirical side of) the rite with the effect, as when one performs certain rites to get one's disease cured. This is not so if the purpose is non-empirical, such as, for instance, the acquisition of spiritual merit. Is the effect, then, direct or indirect? The course of action, or its consequences, do not fall back, distinctly at least, into the empirical world. We do not intend here to discuss further, in all its implications, the definition proposed by Rev. Diehl. It would seem that, in the search for a "neutral" and wide definition, he has introduced a greater degree

[3] According to the Oxford Shorter Dictionary, "instrument" means "A thing with or through which something is done or effected; a means". Technologically, it is a tool of superior complexity, yet less complex than a machine; it needs a hand.

[4] For instance by Talcott Parsons, see below, p. 51, note 8. The reference to Parsons is not out of place, as his ideas have influenced directly or indirectly (p. 19 and note 4). Rev. Diehl's definition. One also notices the relation between "instrument" and "expression" in the definition and elsewhere.

of abstraction than is necessary, and hence advisable.[5] But we should rather judge the method by its fruits. Before doing so, it may be observed that the author is by no means unaware of the difficulties involved in his definition. Is the distinction he draws made by the people themselves? There is no direct certainty about this, but

> The border line between what he [man] himself is doing and where other powers are at play may vary from man to man and from culture to culture, but it will be drawn by all (p. 29).

This may appear a reasonable postulate, but there is no guarantee that the author, by inspection of his (written) material, will be able to draw the line exactly where the people themselves do. The reader may even have some difficulty in following him:

> A man may trust in God . . . and expect help or success. This is direct method. Nothing acts as an intermediary. A direct method knows no instruments. Trust leaves room for direct action, but once a man has taken to intermediaries whereby the effect of the trusted power is being brought about, his action is indirect (p. 25).

In contrast to the definition quoted above ("they are not tools for man's own power"), it would seem that "direct" action is taken here in an altogether different sense. Is trust a rite, an action? And if so, what is the *purpose* of the action? And does God when simply trusted cease to be a "third factor"? When we are told a little further that "When Śiva receives the Ganges in his matted hair, it is direct action. The god is in no need of any instrument" (*ibid.*), it seems that we have wandered still farther from ritual and human action in general. Again, when we read that "the direct method is rare in South India, that is as the exclusive expression of the inner urge" (p. 27), this would seem to confuse two things which are given as different in the basic definition: 1) the expressive aspect of ritual action; 2) the fact that in its purposeful aspect, it acts directly or indirectly. Finally, "direct method" would seem to apply both to technical action, as opposed to religious, and to the expression of religious feelings as apart from purposeful religious action.

There are two reasons why the notion of "instrument" cannot give a

[5] At the same time, the definition may be taken as too narrow: is it possible to define rites independently of beliefs? (above p. 6). There is a distinct refusal to accept a sociological perspective among others: "In all these cases the emphasis has been moved from the phenomena themselves" (p. 17). Nevertheless, the absence of any discussion of, or reference to, the opposition of sacred and profane and the Durkheimian theory of religion is striking.

definition of rite as seems implied in the above definition and its context. One is that there are rites without any purpose, mere expressions of the "inner urge"; the other is that some rites deal *directly* with their supernatural or spiritual object. A few instances can be taken from the factual part of the book. Concluding about daily domestic or private rites Rev. Diehl writes:

While we find a number of details which are instrumental in character ... prayer and meditation, bowing and salutation can be parts of direct worship. They can on the other hand because of their place in the ritual easily turn into means through which the worshipper achieves his purpose (p. 95).

Again, concerning temple worship, and possession:

temple worship is to a large measure a direct method of dealing with the gods (p. 154).

If the kōṭaṅki himself becomes possessed and the gods speak through him, it is direct method (p. 233).

In one place, finally, the distinction is recognized as unworkable:

If the festival had a ritual which aimed at making Śiva glad ..., the rites were not to be classified as instruments. But there is no difference among the rituals. Essentially the same items of rites at one time gladden Śiva and at another bring about health and wealth .... Their efficacy is but loosely connected with their contents. As they are celebrated to-day one cannot ascribe to them their right place and purpose by a penetrating analysis of the details (p. 179).

After all this, one would think that the author recognizes that he is dealing, through the notion of "instrument", only with one kind of rites (although it may be found difficult to leave aside so easily what is called above "direct worship").[6] But he seems to have forgotten this limitation when he writes at the beginning of the conclusion:

All evidences presented ... have gone to show the indirect character of the rites and their component parts (p. 334).

As to "purpose", a single passage, concerning the daily rites at home, will suffice to show the difficulties involved. It is difficult to imagine any but

[6] It comes as a shock to the reader when he finds that the word "worship" is used in a quite indiscriminate manner. Notwithstanding a scholarly note on *pūjā* (p. 91), it is translated straight away as "worship", and *āyudha pūjā* as "worship of the tools" (p. 29, see also p. 170). These very words would seem to pose a problem, and one wonders whether a study of ritual, however refined it may be in its terminology, is of any use when such basic and immediate problems remain unheeded. Even outwardly the *pūjā* is after all a very particular sort of "worship", but no attempt is made here to circumscribe this aspect, so striking for a western observer.

a vague and general purpose to the rites which the Brahman must perform every day:

> In daily routine the purpose is at first sight less prominent ... But the negative purpose is more evident. Evil is averted through the observance of the rites, and their neglect would spell disaster ... [here is inserted a quite hypothetical discussion]. ... This is not *in re* different from attending a ceremony with a set purpose. There is in this case a general purpose of well-being and maintenance of one's prerogatives (p. 92).

In short, although the concept of "purpose" has been made a central one in the analysis, there is no use in distinguishing between general and specific, negative and positive purpose; but at the same time it is assumed that the rite has a purpose, and a mere personal or human one at that.[7] Our author is after any trace he can find in the texts of a specific purpose in each case. He is quite unaware of the danger involved. The kind of brahmanical literature he uses is very often busy advertising its wares and rituals, so that the purposes mentioned may, more often than not, proceed from secondary, utilitarian rationalization. There is no real check, as we read of rites, that "their efficacy is but loosely connected with their contents" (quoted above). (In relation to this criticism, see p. 156-157, and 84-85; also index, s.v. *palaṇ*). On the whole, the category of purpose is particularly ill-fitted to the study of literary evidence. Only observation can distinguish the cases in which there is a distinct, special purpose from those in which there is not. In any case, this distinction, and other conceivable distinctions in terms of purpose, are not attempted here.

At this point, it seems worthwhile to attempt to form a judgement on the main thesis. The difficulties encountered by the author in the application of his definition, as they appear in the above quotations, the fact, for instance, that a part of the worship in temples has to be left out, make it clear that the definition is too narrow and that it introduces a dichotomy in rituals which remains unjustified. It covers perhaps magic, but certainly not the whole of religion. Why? All rites are not actions with empirical aims making use of a non-empirical factor. Other rites are simply directed at this non-empirical factor itself. In a book quoted by the present author, T. Parsons, in a discussion of Pareto, has clearly distinguished the two ways in which religious action is not rational: a) it is "irrational" or "unscientific" when it follows non-empirical procedures to attain empirical aims; b) it is "non-rational" or "non-scientific" when

[7] There is a vedic reference appended to the passage. This reminds one that rites may have cosmic purposes.

it is addressed beyond the empirical world.[8] Only the first case is covered by Rev. Diehl's definition. Moreover, as Parsons also remarks, this sphere which, starting from modern science, we call non-empirical has for the believer an empirical reality. Both are so intimately woven into each other that in some cases the analytical distinction may be difficult to maintain. As we read above: "The same ... rites at one time gladden Śiva and at another bring about health and wealth". At one time, at another? This is perhaps more a difference of emphasis than of nature: the rites do both things. We touch here on the difficulty of isolating definite special purposes in religion proper. As Hocart warned us, the ends of a ritual complex are general in comparison with those of "rational" action.[9] Finally, in our view, the concept of (distinct, special) purpose breaks down, as a tool for analysis of religious ritual as a whole, as does that of instrument. Certainly Rev. Diehl is aware of the factual characteristics of religion we have adduced. But he has been misled by his procedure and, in all probability, chiefly by the tendency to discuss religious action along lines which fit only other types of action.

What, then, does the Conclusion bring? Apart from general remarks, it is devoted to an examination of the material in the light of Goode's criteria for distinguishing magic and religion. It is shown that it is impossible in South India to disentangle the two, present as they are in

[8] Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, (Glencoe, Ill., ed. 1957), p. 200 sq. and p. 456 sq.

[9] Writing about initiation and circumcision, Hocart discards the distinction between "magical" and "rational" and replaces it by "generalization" and "specialization": "at one end is a vague general quest of life, a quest ill-adapted to secure any particular component of weal, but generally helpful in life; at the other end appear highly specialized techniques concentrating on one specific objective" (*The Life-Giving Myth*, p. 167). Hocart's awareness of the general ends of religious ritual corresponds to certain characteristics of the sacred, and also to a trend in modern studies (see for instance Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, Eng. trans. W. R. Trask, (London, 1955).

The rejection by Hocart of the "rational" on the ground that it is not actually in these matters an objective but a subjective category, rooted in the particular modern outlook, should not create the impression that it contradicts the above discussion about rationality and religion. When Talcott Parsons deals with this, he is considering a historical development, namely how religious action has found its way into a trend of thought dominated by the consideration of rational action. On the contrary, when Parsons attempts for his own account a classification of types of action, he does not refer to rational and non-rational, but to specific and diffuse, universal and particular, etc. The convergence with Hocart is obvious. It is true that, in dealing with religion, Parsons maintains, as does Rev. Diehl, that all people draw a line somewhere between empirical and non-empirical (*The Social System*, p. 367). Hocart is more coherent, but his statement bears more on religion than on magic in the common sense of the word.

varying proportions as well in the worship of gods in Brahmanical temples as in what we may call – the author does not do so – the magic of a specialized practitioner. This is certainly a valid conclusion of wide impact, putting into relief a basic characteristic of Indian ritualism. It is often happily expressed. In particular, it is stressed that magic is not independent from the "third factor":[10]

> ... instruments have their effect through a power deputed from the gods. Without doubt this is the common conception in India (p. 345).
>
> As far as South India is concerned one will have great difficulties in trying to find rites of any kind performed with complete lack of submissive attitude (p. 23).

This conclusion is solidly established, but it was not unexpected for anyone acquainted with the field, and taken by itself it is somewhat disproportionate to the quantity of material brought together, and to the effort made towards abstract definition. Apart from this, the descriptive portion of the book is of value by itself; for the student of Indian religion, it is, we think, its most valuable part.

After a consideration of literary sources, rites and rituals are described in the following order: a) the regular course of life (domestic and temple daily rituals, calendar festivals, the individual's life); b) unforeseen crises (diagnosis and remedies, including a large section on magic or *māntirīkam*).

To begin with, the author has performed a signal service in listing with bibliographical care, and for a large part for the first time, a number of ritual treatises mainly in Tamil (p. 42-65). He first considers the Agamas, in particular two of them found to be most important in the region, then manuals of more current use, and other literature, astrological, local, and magical (p. 279 sq.). In each of the following sections, one sort of ritual is described, chiefly from the literature, but also to a small extent and in varying proportion from direct observation. Daily home rites are described in their Shaiva form mainly according to Agorasivacariyar;[11] there follows a brief comparison from Vaishnava sources, and in the case of temple ritual, sketches of the worship in practice in a few cases (Madura, Rameshwaram, and Tirupati), to end with the discussion in terms of "instrument and purpose".

In all this, as everywhere, the texts are closely followed, all terms are

[10] Cf., in a limited field, Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

[11] The author writes: "Akoracivacariyar". He transcribes Tamil words and names literally according to the Tamil Lexicon. This keeps close to written Tamil but is phonetically inaccurate. It is possible to be equally precise while allowing oneself to distinguish between sounded and soundless consonants, etc.

transliterated, and the original concepts are carefully studied. For instance, the Shaiva temple ritual is analysed in its 70 sections with their Tamil names (p. 100-146). Without being able to look at the original, one cannot but recognize here a work of solid scholarship.[12] It will be indispensable, it will supersede many of the previous works dealing with the same region, and probably remain a model of its kind. The matter stands a little differently if one considers to what use this excellent material is put. The ritual is so complex that the danger here is, in the author's own words, "to become lost in the mass of details which make up the ritual and their, at first sight, seemingly meaningless repetition" (p. 98). Rev. Diehl provides an outline in ten parts, and this is sufficient to order reasonably "the mass of details", but for real understanding an analysis would be needed, and one cannot but regret to read that:

> A systematic analysis of these elements and their organic function as parts of a whole will require a separate study (p. 99).

One understands this, given the wide field the author has chosen to survey, but one cannot help thinking that an analysis of a part of it might have been more fruitful than this gigantic survey, and one hopes that Rev. Diehl will some day give us this "separate study". Similarly, although the author is aware of the problem of the relation between literary descriptions and actual practice, his notes on the latter, interesting as they are in themselves, do not throw much light on the matter.

The remarks just made apply in general also to the other sections of the description. A number of direct observations, although carefully localized and dated, do not make up a study, nor do they throw sufficient light on the written material which remains the main substance of the book. The section on festivals (p. 161-180) contains a commented and enlightening translation of the detailed official programme of the Citrai Festival of Minakshi-Sundareshvarar at Madura, with occasional reference to the local Purana; it is much, but it is not enough, as the festival would be worth a detailed analysis. The next section, on the ceremonies of the individual's life, is also very short and taken mainly

[12] Although full scholarly precision and apparatus was often lacking, texts have not only been used but also translated in the past. For instance, the Abbé Dubois had given, for the description of daily home rites, a translation of an unspecified "*nitya karma*" manual (*Manners and Customs*, ch. VII, French ed., 1825, t. I, p. 327-377). A detailed account of Śri Vaishnava ritual, which our author mentions, has been given by K. Rangachari in *The Śri Vaishnava Brahmans* (Madras, 1931, Bull. Madras Govt. Museum, N.S., Gen. Section, vol. III, Part 2). The description of daily home rites is based on Śri Bhāshyakāra's "Nityam".

from western literature, abundant on this point. We come then to the second half of the description of ritual, entitled "Unforeseen Crises" (p. 197-334) which includes means of diagnosis (astrology, etc., including what we shall call possession), and remedies (worship, pilgrimages, vows, sacrifices, and mainly magic; p. 235-334). This last topic is studied at length and represents probably one of the most original parts of the book. Eight different manuals are summed up in detail, and the whole is discussed, only in terms of instrument and purpose, but "purpose' fits better here than it did in other sections.

It is impossible to give an idea of the wealth of detail contained in most of these sections. Apart from the data themselves, there are also a number of interesting remarks. All this could scarcely have been done better, given the scope of the work. Finally, a good index makes its use easy as a book of reference.

On the whole, with all its merits, linguistic accuracy and attempted methodological precision, this work illustrates once more, in our view, the difficulty of an extensive study of literary expressions of Hinduism. We believe that a sociological compass would have helped, if not in mapping these uncharted seas, at least in defining a course across some part of them. At least a vast amount of material has been made more easy of access, and some valid conclusions have been reached regarding magic and religion.

POSSESSION AND PRIESTHOOD

We have considered above the basic "ultimate value" of Hindu society, and we have attempted to show the possibility, if not the probability, of its commanding the nature of belief in spiritual beings (p. 34). Incidentally, we have referred to the distinction between different sorts of cult, i.e. mainly lineage cults and locality cults, which begins to emerge from the study. It is highly probable that the cult of the *kula-devata* is in all parts of India sometimes a lineage cult. The distinction is useful, and the stress on the worshipping group is of particular interest for the sociologist, because he is better equipped for the study of (group) cults than for that of individual devotion, and thinks, therefore, that he should begin with the former.

The next consideration which recommends itself is that of the specialists who play a role in these cults – their functionaries. In the present state of our knowledge, this has proved to be a reasonable level for the definition and comparison of religions. Christopher Dawson has briefly and convincingly opposed a religion of priesthood (Indian, but more Vedic than Hindu), a religion of prophecy (Hebrew: The Old Testament), and a religion of kingship (Ancient Egypt).[1] No doubt, Dawson's definition would apply to Hinduism if we were to look only at its sacred books, but, and this is an interesting point, the matter is more complex if one observes the actual practice. Apart from the priest, there is another person who plays a fundamental role. At least, this is what we shall attempt to show from the literature. All over the country there are people who,

[1] Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (London, 1949), ch. IV-VI. Cf. also Frankfort's contrast between the Pharao, god among men, and the Sumerian King humbly praying for his god's will to be revealed to him (Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1944).

in certain circumstances and especially in festivals, are believed to be possessed by one deity or by several deities or spirits in succession. The god speaks through the man – more rarely through the woman – who incarnates him or upon whom he alights. This person is referred to in the literature under a great variety of names, such as "oracle", "diviner", "shaman", "magician", and native terms.

The contention here is that we are dealing with an institutionalized function complementing priesthood. While the priest makes offerings to the deities, in turn the deities impart their commands, advice and knowledge through their mouthpiece. The most general term to designate the function might be "theopneusty". A similar combination is found in Polynesia with the *tohunga* or priest and the *taula*, translated as "prophet".[2] If "prophet" is not devoid of ambiguity, "oracle" might be the best English expression, especially in view of the distinction to be maintained between the institutional possession of the specialist, and the occasional possession of persons by evil spirits or "demons" which are exorcized, most often by the "oracle" himself.

The purpose here is not to trace the history of the subject all through the (modern) literature, but to refer to it to show the prevalence of the feature. To begin with South India and the Tamil country in particular, one of the most interesting sources is the description by Bishop Caldwell. The author of the classical "Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages" was stationed for many years on the coast of Tinnevelly District, and in 1849 he published a brilliant pamphlet on the religion of the Shanars (better known to-day as Nadars), the local toddy-tappers. Caldwell vividly pictures the frantic "devil-dancing" accompanied with fierce music and combined with bloody sacrifices, during which possession occurred. For our purposes, two points are worthy of note. First, it is doubtful that Caldwell looked very closely into the matter, as he says that the dancing is "not appropriated to a particular order of men but may be performed by any one who chooses".[3] From what we know from other sources, this may be true for a casual observer, but it does not preclude there being specialists impersonating a deity, who, once appointed, remain for their entire lifetimes; nor does it preclude there being, at

[2] This is precisely how the opposition is expressed in Samoa and Tonga. For some detail, and a bibliography, see Mircea Eliade, *Chamanisme*, p. 332 sq. (cf. below, p. 64, n. 6).

[3] Quoted from the summary in Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South Indian Gods* (Madras, 1869), p. 168. Also, there is "no priestly order. Not infrequently the headman acts as priest, but he may be superseded for the time being by any voluntary devotee" (*ibid.*, p. 174).

least in some groups in the region, a precise division of religious functions.[4] A second point is of more general impact and of greater historical interest. Bishop Caldwell sees the difference between brahmanical, literary Hinduism and those popular cults, and like many less acute minds, misled probably in part by his haste to compare such creeds with what is to him the true religion, he widens this difference into a chasm; the common name Hinduism denotes many contradictory creeds: "the connection of the Shanars with the Brahmanical system is so small that they may be considered as votaries of a different religion" (*ibid.*, p. 158). Possession is part of the propitiation of devils, or spiritual beings of "unmixed malignity" (as opposed to literary Hindu gods). This is Dravidian demonolatry, a "shamanism" to be compared with those of High Asia.[5] This reminds us once more that the century which has built up comparative linguistics has failed in comparative religion, but this destructive dichotomy can still serve as a warning to-day. The notion of "demonolatry", obscure as it is, is only in the process of disappearing, as we shall see.[6]

Concerning the spread of possession in South India, which would seem universal, the reader may be referred to the two books reviewed above. The Coorgs have it, as some of the quotations have shown (see index, s.v. Oracles). It seems that Professor Srinivas does not use the word demon or devil at all;[7] for him the "Bhadrakali oracle" is the Coorg institutionally possessed by the goddess Bhadrakali (p. 189 sq.). This case clearly shows the two functions, that of the (Brahman) priest and that of the (Coorg) oracle. It is noteworthy that, while Coorgs incarnate local deities, in their ancestors' propitiations the Coorg ancestors speak through specialists of a particular low caste (*Baṇṇa*, p. 42-43); facts similar to this are known from Kerala.[8]

[4] For the same district, see H. R. Pate, *Tinnevelly Gazetteer*, Vol. I (Madras, 1917), p. 109 and 117 (hereditary function). Cf. with Srinivas's account for the Coorgs. The most systematic organization reported is from lineage temples among Pramalai Kallar in Madura District (Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 339 sq.).

[5] This is in evidence in the *Comparative Grammar*, p. 118, 580 sq., and is summed up by Crooke in his article "Dravidians" of the *Encyclopoedia of Religion and Ethics*. Concerning the distinction between possession and shamanism, cf. below, p. 64.

[6] For the same area as Caldwell's, the Gazetteer of Tinnevelly also writes of "demons' temples" (*pēy-kōil*), an expression used most probably from outside to distinguish such temples from orthodox brahmanical temples. The author contradicts himself, there being at the same time neither temples nor priests, although ritual functions are enumerated; ("Priest" may apply here to a specialized caste) (*loc. cit.*, p. 114).

[7] It is true that he seems to have avoided as far as possible the words "god" and "goddess", referring rather to a "deity" (cf. the chapter on Hinduism, p. 222 sq.).

[8] K. M. Panikkar, "Some Aspects of Nayar Life", *Journ. Roy. Anthrop. Institute*, 1918, p. 279.

Rev. Diehl also mentions oracles at length (p. 221-235). He recognizes the importance of possession.[9] According to its place in the book, possession is considered more as a means of divination than as part of the regular ritual of groups. But there is elsewhere (p. 263) an interesting description of a group of Sakkili or cobblers (most probably a lineage) going to worship their god; among them are a priest and two "god-dancers".[10] This word translates exactly one of the Tamil expressions, and the author points out that "devil-dancer" is a misnomer (p. 221). In another place, there is still some ambiguity (about *dēvatei*, deity, p. 279, note 3), but the crucial feature appears, namely that a demon which becomes the object of a cult becomes a god.[11] Our author gives an analysis of a book in Tamil written for the oracle's guidance (p. 226-232). This seems to refer to a slightly different case, that of a (urban?) practitioner dealing with customers, using a little girl as medium, invoking a number of gods in succession, and finding out what the trouble is by asking a number of questions of the medium. There, we are already somewhat remote from the "god-dancer" officiating as oracle for the members of his lineage or people from the neighbourhood.

Among writers dealing with the eastern part of South India, Whitehead, who describes local cults, has a few references to possession of the priest, mainly from the Tamil area.[12] In this connection it may be noted that, in a given group, while the two functions can be allocated to different individuals, they can also be combined in the same individual (*Coorgs*, p. 225). Elmore has a chapter on "Demon Possession", but it concerns only evil possession and exorcism. He also mentions possession by deities.[13]

It is highly probable that there are regional differences in India on this point as on many others. It may be the case that the neat division of labour exhibited by some South Indian groups, or failing that, the fact,

[9] Note with references, p. 234, n. 1. Many references could be added; see G. Oppert, *Original Inhabitants*, p. 559, note (see below, p. 76, n. 3).

[10] And two boxes; one of the gods incarnate is probably a meat-eater, the other one a vegetarian. Cf. Appendix, p. 82.

[11] Cf. Appendix, p. 82. Also Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 405, etc.: a demon is normally exorcized, not worshipped; the moment it gets included in a temple, it has become a god. But in certain contexts, if its (previous) essence is referred to, apart from the position it has acquired, it can still be called a demon (p. 369, *b*). Elmore has written: "It is common for writers on Hinduism to treat the Dravidian gods under the heading of Demons or Demonology" (*Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, Madras, 1925, p. 47, n. 1).

[12] Rev. Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (Calcutta, 1921); see index, s.v. Possession; and p. 52; only the northern part of the Tamil area is considered.

[13] W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods*, p. 47-53; 54-55.

possibly more widespread, of one individual combining the two functions of priest and oracle, is less common in North India. Regarding the latter area, the claim should perhaps be more modest, namely that anywhere some individuals, belonging to one caste or another, are known as being possessed, in certain circumstances, by deities or spirits. This fact is obscured by the use of terms such as "magician" or "diviner" to denote these people. For instance, regarding Dravidian tribes in North India, Crooke wrote: "domestic worship is conducted by senior members, but all have priests ..., the duties of medicine-man, sorcerer, exorcist, or witch-finder being generally combined in a single individual or class.[14] A very similar enumeration is given by Briggs in his study of the Camars, together with diverse native terms:[15] in the pages that follow, the use of magical formulas or mantras is characteristically mingled with possession and means for getting control of spirits. The same thing appears in the more recent work by the same author on the Doms. Dealing mainly with wizards (*ojhā*), and after quoting a number of mantras and describing a "seance" in which possession has been much in evidence,[16] the author writes:

> "Possession" appears as an important element in their technique. All the ojhas involved in this account [they are from Benares, Jubbulpore, Gaya], both men and women, in widely separated areas, used a set form of physical exercise for attaining the ecstatic state or condition of possession (p. 432).

This passage, and the whole chapter from which it is extracted, should suffice to establish our claim. There remains of course the fact of the combination of possession with magic, and, possibly in correlation with it, the control of several "spirits" (through a more powerful one) as opposed to possession by a single one. This may be even too simple a formulation, but it is indicative of a situation in which it is possible to hold, for the present, that magic plays a secondary role as compared to possession or the oracular function (see below, p. 64, n. 7).

[14] Article "Dravidians" of *ERE*, § 49, the Priesthood.
[15] G. W. Briggs, *The Chamars* (O.U.P., 1920), p. 186 sq.
[16] G. W. Briggs, *The Doms and their near Relations* (Mysore, [1953]), p. 404-432.

Verrier Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* (Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1955). xxiv, 597 p., plates (71 ph., 1 col. ph.), 63 figs., 2 maps, bibl., 2 indexes.

Verrier Elwin is deservedly one of the best known anthropologists in the Indian field. With Professor Fürer-Haimendorf, he is one of the two fieldworkers of non-Indian origin who have contributed most, in the last twenty years, to the knowledge of Indian tribes. He has published more than eleven ethnographical books, some of which, such as *The Muria and their Ghotul* and, to a lesser degree, the present one, are monuments of intensive and protracted field study, detailed and superb description. He has sometimes been criticized for his occasional sentimentality,[1] but after all this is a small price to pay for his deep identification with the people being studied, to which we owe so many perceptive descriptions, autobiographies and confessions. All this is worth acknowledging, but it might not be a sufficient reason for considering his last book here at some length if the religion of the Hill Saoras of Orissa had nothing to do with Hinduism. The claim has been made in these pages (*Contr.*, I, p. 8) that the tribesmen have not "escaped ... the influence of Indian civilisation". (It is not implied that the author of this book expresses or shares the idea of heterogeneity between tribal religion and Hinduism, or, as it has so often been called in the past, between "animism" and Hinduism).[2] Here is an opportunity for testing our contention on a considerable body of data. The test will be all the better, as the Saoras do not speak a Dravidian but a Munda language, and as, for those who like to see a connection between language and culture, this evokes more "Austro-Asiatic" than Hindu affinities. The two views are not incompatible; especially as long as the culturological emphasis is on individual features in concrete detail, while our emphasis is on features of structural importance, or, better still, on relations between institutional features, both kinds of affinity can be found in existence without contradiction.

One point can be cleared up easily. If a certain system of ideas and actions outlined above and defined as the Hindu opposition of pure and impure is fundamental to Hinduism, then, the Saoras are not Hindus, for their ideas in the matter are very sketchy. V. Elwin himself discusses the matter in several places. For instance, while considering the varieties of Saora sacrifice, he says: "The notion of ceremonial impurity exists,

[1] E.g. F. G. Bailey in *Man*, 1957, no. 50.

[2] We shall see some evidence to the contrary. To write, as we did, that "most so-called 'primitives' in India are only people who have lost contact" (*ibid.*) is at the same time too ambitious and too narrow.

but it is very weak. A shaman or priest should technically bathe before offering sacrifice... [this is reduced and] it is often omitted. There are certain lustrations at the funerary rites." There follow remarks concerning menstruation (p. 491-492; on the latter see also p. 520). It can be added that some distinctions or interdictions are found, which are similar to some found in Hinduism, but they are not expressed in terms of pure and impure. For instance, we shall see that the two highest classes of "shamans" do not officiate in funerary rites. Sexual intercourse in the house of the officiating priest is tabu before a ceremony; if the rule is broken a supernatural sanction follows immediately.

At the same time, Saoras do not ignore the importance attached by Hindus to these things: 'A shaman can sacrifice when his human wife is in her period, but not when his spirit-wife, his tutelary, is in hers; this again is because she is a Hindu" (p. 492). This quotation introduces the striking fact, to which attention will be devoted later, of a close dependence of Saoras upon Hindus in belief. For the moment we want to stress that the Saoras do not imitate the Hindus in the recognition of impurity. They do not submit directly to the scheme of Hindu values. Similarly, in the recent past they did not submit passively either to the domination and depredations of Hindus, recognized by Government as their superiors or rulers in the Ganjam Agency,[3] or to the exploitation by Doms, purveyors of buffaloes for sacrifice and usurers (the Doms are Christians; p. 530 sq.). The repeated outbursts and riots show that the Saoras asserted themselves by corporate action against the outside world. Such people can be called "autonomous" (see above, p. 42).

Before going any further, something has to be said about the plan and general character of the book under review, for these will command the critic's approach. After a general introduction concerning social organization, which is unfortunately too short (p. 1-64), two chapters follow on Saora pneumatology (p. 65-76) and theology (p. 77-127). Both of these are very brief with the exception, in the latter, of a discussion about the existence of a belief in a supreme god (p. 83-95) and a long catalogue of Saora gods (p. 95-127), made up for the most part of very short notes, the number of gods being very great. Then come two chapters on the specialists, priests, shamans and "shamanins" (female shamans) (p. 130-171), followed by a description of the "apparatus and technique of

[3] The Saoras have been left more independent in Koraput district (p. 34-35). We know of some differences in religion between the two areas, as the absence of Buyyas or village-priests in Koraput (see below, p. 67). A systematic comparison is not given.

ritual", and the three chapters which are central for our purpose. These describe, in almost two hundred pages (218-400), the rites in connection with disease, fertility and the dead. Here a great many ceremonies witnessed by the author are described in detail. Many of the pronouncements of the shamans, possessed or not, during these ceremonies are given in close translation. There follows a description, with designs, of as many as fifty "ikons" or designs painted on the walls of houses in honour or the dead and the gods (many of them exquisitely reproduced), and a study of the considerable "cost of religion". The three following chapters are more analytical than descriptive (prayer and trance, nature of sacrifice, importance of dreams), and the book closes with three chapters on "Saora ethic", one on taboos, one on the attitude to human life (including murder and suicide), and one on "values and motives".

This long enumeration might give the impression that everything has been described, and there is no doubt that the author has attempted to be exhaustive and to describe the whole of Saora religion, while at the same time bringing his thought to bear on some important aspects of it. Still something is lacking. It might be said that no systematic attempt is made to relate religion to social organization; yet, we shall see that it is in part possible to distinguish village cults, lineage cults and individual – or family – propitiations. More characteristic is the fact that, although the study is exhaustive, it is not complete. There are two ways of defining a "whole". To quote Karl Popper,[4] it can mean

[either] a) the totality of all the properties or aspects of a thing ...
[or] b) certain special properties or aspects of the thing in question, namely those which make it appear an organized structure rather than a "mere heap".

Our author has taken the first way; we prefer the second. In a) the emphasis is on an exhaustive inventory of features; this is what Verrier Elwin has chosen. For instance, he describes all the aspects or all the gods of Saora religion. He amply recognizes that the gods, their myths, their order of precedence, have a limited spread within the Saora area:

> It is not easy to list the Saora gods, for there is a bewildering variety of them; each area, sometimes each village, has its special cult; the same god may be known by different names; and a god who is of great importance in one area may be almost unknown in another (p. 77).
>
> Our difficulty is that the Saora myths are confused and even contradictory. There is no such thing as a corpus of Saora myth, known throughout the tribe and universally accepted. ... The stories occur sporadically and are often known only in limited areas ... (p. 86).

[4] *The Poverty of Historicism* (London, 1957), p. 67.

> The Saoras, in fact, like to arrange people in order, and the ideas of settling the question of precedence among the gods is thus in no way alien to them. The difficulty is that they do not seem able to make up their minds. Not only is there great difference of opinion in different areas, but even the same informant will attribute supreme qualities today to one god and tomorrow to another (p. 84).

It may be noted that the strange phrase just quoted recurs on the next page: "the Saoras have never been able to make up their minds whether Kittung is a supramundane deity or a simple cult-hero". What can this mean, but that Kittung has to be regarded as having this double aspect? We have quoted the three passages at some length, because the situation is quite typical.[5] The third passage, more complex, does not justify the long discussion on an hypothetical Supreme Being. Regarding the first two, the remedy seems to be at hand: the area has to be broken up into smaller ones for intensive consideration. If Saora religion is not uniform "throughout the tribe", then what is Saora religion? It is not the catalogue of everything found within the area, for can one feature be said to belong to Saora religion if it holds only for a part of the area? Rather, does it not belong to Saora religion in so far as *the part it plays* in some localities is played elsewhere as well, but by a different feature? Saora religion does not exist in space, but in different forms in different places. In actual fact, as we shall see, some general features come out of Verrier Elwin's description. But regarding the gods, it is a pity that he has not attempted to look at smaller "wholes" in Popper's second sense of the word, and to see whether, while the gods shift and change from one village to another, there are not certain *relations* between them which are found widely, if not universally. In a work as detailed as this, it is surprising not to find a few inventories of the shrines existing in a village. There is a general description of shrines, private and public (p. 172-176), and during the harvest festivals, one of the obvious high points of Saora religion (see p. 325), we see processions going "from shrine to shrine" (p. 331, 333). When by chance some precision is given, it is revealing (gods under names not found elsewhere, p. 331).

The same lack of structural perspective is found, regarding gods, in yet another respect. There are many signs that gods are collective entities. For instance, we are told that the spirits of people dying of a certain disease join the deity of that disease and become merged within it

[5] A similar situation, on the same subject, has been mentioned earlier (*Contr.*, I, p. 40). It might be taken as a Hindu situation in the sense of *Contr.*, I, p. 13, § 2. But, after all, in its principle if not in its degree and bearing, it is a common situation in ethnography.

(so that the deity is, in the long run, made up, at least in part, of the spirits of people who died of that disease). Also, in the invocations addressed to deities by the shamans, even when one deity is said to be particularly concerned, more often than not, several deities are invoked. Are these groupings of deities merely random, as is implied by the fact that the author, although he must have been in possession of a vast number of documents of this kind, did not attempt to compare them? Notwithstanding these facts, Verrier Elwin does attempt all the time to write of particular, individual, deities. He believes, it seems, in individuals. Or, it may be said, he seems to do so because his real interest is elsewhere. Of course, he does say what needs to be said about the gods, but, either on account of the difficulties mentioned in the passages quoted, or because of some psychological interests (less in evidence though they are here than in his *Ghotul*), he gets more absorbed in the shaman's experience and trance, in the human side of the relationship.

This criticism was intended to show, along with the recurrence of certain Indian situations and the fallacy of completeness by enumeration, that some questions cannot be asked of this book. Nevertheless, as it stands, it is an admirable work, and we shall attempt to sum it up, from our point of view, as accurately as possible. The material is so rich that a detailed analysis may perhaps yield still more, but such an analysis cannot be attempted in a few pages. We shall be content with a few remarks bearing mainly on the three central chapters, seen from a Hindu perspective.

The basic feature of Saora religious activities is the central role played by what V. Elwin designates as shamanism, something closely akin to what we have here called possession. The term "shamanism" is not defined, but its use can be justified even if one wants to maintain a distinction between shamanism and possession. For the purpose, Mircea Eliade's definitions will be used.[6] In shamanism there is more than the habitual Hindu possession by, or incarnation of, Gods or spirits. The Saora shamans, male or female, do fall into trances as do their Hindu counterparts, but, distinctively, they journey to the Under World,[7] and they are initiated after a personal mystical experience. Also,

[6] Mircea Eliade, *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris, 1951). The distinction is not made in the *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, 6th ed. (London, 1951), p. 181.

[7] Trance is not a condition *sine qua non* of shamanism. Eliade (*op. cit.*) considers it rather as a sign of mixture, and stresses the mastery exercised by the shamans over the spirits. The Saora shaman summons the spirits, and they come (with the help of his tutelary, but this is probably in accord with the general case). Do the Saora shamans journey? Certainly they live in both worlds, but often their tutelaries come

the cosmological ideas associated with shamanism, even if in a residual state, are present; apart from this world and the Under World of the dead, there is something like an Upper World of spirits or gods, on earth, in the air and in the sky. These worlds communicate through a thread, or a ladder.[8] In particular, in the village festival for recent dead, or Karja, a bamboo pole is let down from above through a hole in the thatch until it stands on the ground in the main room of the house. This is called the "heavenly ladder" and is in evidence throughout the rite (p. 381). Similarly, on another occasion, to collect the dead person's soul or "shade", a stick is pushed through the roof, water is made to flow on it from above and is collected at the bottom (p. 363).

Other features of the same kind would call for South-East Asian parallels.[9]

The way in which the shamans acquire their powers is apparently unparalleled. Although training, and transmission from living shamans, generally relatives, play a part, the decisive element is the marriage with a tutelary. The future shaman is visited in dreams by a spirit of the opposite sex, belonging to the rulers or upper-class of the Under World, who proposes to marry him (or her). The offer is at first declined and the pressure of the spirit resisted, until finally, troubled with disease or ill-treated in dreams, the human being sees no way out of the vocation so imposed and agrees. The marriage is solemnly performed. From then on, the spirit is the shaman's "tutelary", i.e. a spiritual spouse who will protect and instruct the shaman, possess him in the first place on all occasions, and act as an intermediary for the action upon, and the possession through, ancestors as well as gods. Who are these "tutelaries"? They inhabit the Under World together with the dead,

> But the tutelaries are of definitely higher rank and possess greater powers. They are dressed better, they have more appetising food, they live in bigger houses, they have greater freedom of movement, they are more respectable.

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to them in this world or carry them to the Under World. Flying, even in an airplane, is frequent (p. 138, 150). There is evidence for thinking that invocations of the spirits are equivalent to searching for them (p. 323). Finally the situation is ambivalent, rather than ambiguous.

[8] P. 70. The bear and the porcupine of the Under World (index, *s.v.*) and other animals recall the most common animal familiar spirits of shamans, whose functional role is taken up here by the tutelaries.

[9] A striking detail: in the northern area, a pair of female breasts is carved at the bottom of the central pillar of the house, below a small ledge on which offerings may be placed (p. 41). We read about Negritos of Malaya that in the Country of the Dead there is a tree at the base of whose trunk "are numbers of breasts from which flows milk" (Ivor H. N. Evans, *Studies in Religion*, p. 157).

They are regarded as Hindus and observe some of the rules and taboos of caste; they may, for example, eat goats and fowls but no other meat; their women observe menstruation restrictions. Their relations with the ancestors are not unlike those between the Hindus of the plains and the Saoras of the hills (p. 68). ... the great Saora shamans become Hindus after death (p. 63).

Thus, the relation of the Saoras with their spirits is achieved through marriage of their shamans with some of the Hindu dead, considered of higher rank and greater power than their own. This is worth considering more closely. The question concerns not only the nature of the spirit, but also the nature of the link through which it becomes a tutelary, i.e. marriage. While a shaman in Eliade's sense generally has a "familiar spirit" with functions similar to those of the Saora tutelary, this relation seems unique. Marriage is something like the central social institution of the Hindus, the importance of which we have had occasion to stress here several times (from the point of view of religion, see especially p. 33 above). By what stretch of the imagination could such a religion be considered as absolutely alien to Hinduism? V. Elwin himself often perceives the presence of pan-Indian features and, concerning the character of Saora religion, it may be said that he does not see it in isolation, but he has a tendency to look at the relations with the spirits as a sort of reflection of the relations with outsiders. He links fear of the spirits, the "neurotic dread and apprehension" which seems at first sight to characterize Saora religion, with hostility towards outsiders:

We must consider too the social and political setting in which this religion has developed: the Saoras at war with the world, even today suspicious of strangers, hostile – and naturally hostile – to the outsiders who only visit them to lie and cheat and rob (p. 575).

He goes even further: he writes of first-fruits offerings in the harvest festivals as "honorific sacrifices", and says:

The sacrifice is a simple acknowledgement of overlordship. ... The festivals are based on two fundamental ideas – the Saora conception of the ownership of land [the gods being the owners] and a belief in the enormous social importance of who eats first (p. 487).[10]

The Saora sense for precedence is several times referred to (above, p. 62, quotation, § 3). But fear and hostility are clearly not the last word when it is by marriage with the spirit of a Raja or a Paik that a

[10] In a comparative perspective this is difficult to admit: the crops must be desacralized before they can be eaten, as they belong to the gods in a much deeper sense than that implied in "ownership". About the distinction between this ownership and sacredness, see Robertson Smith quoted in Steiner, *Taboo*, p. 70 sq.

shamanin acquires her powers, so indispendable to the Saoras. (Even a Dom girl is mentioned as one of a shaman's two tutelaries, p. 138.)

Apart from what has been briefly summed up above, we find little about the relations with Hindus in ordinary life. There are traces of recent Hindu influences (repugnance to sacrifice of cows, p. 337; making vegetarian offerings together with Hindus, *ibid.*; cremation as recent, p. 341). And how can the idea have come to Saoras that they might come in contact, even in dreams or in the Under World, with the spirits of dead Hindus? There may have been occasional marriages between Hindus of the martial castes and Saora girls. And there is another possibility. The Doms, from their functions on cremation grounds, believe widely that they can master ghosts of every caste.[11] The contact with Doms may have been more intimate than the author has found it to be nowadays. At any rate, the feature is indicative of the Saoras' recourse, in the spiritual world, to a Hindu connection with Hindus. In myths, a woman and an animal or a god are connected through marriage in a similar way (marriage with a snake in the typical myth of Ajorapur, a sacrifice to snakes responsible for children's diseases, p. 277-279; marriage with a tiger in Kinnapur, a sacrifice to the tiger spirit in relation to crops, p. 307; marriage with a god in connection with the consecration of seed, p. 316-321).[12]

There is a remarkable degree of division of labour among the functionaries of Saora religion. The Buyya is a sort of village priest, found in Ganjam only, perhaps more accurately a deputy village headman in charge of ritual functions for the village (mainly in the harvest festival). The Kuranmarans are "shamans" of many sorts. The Idaimaran and Siggamaran are specialists of funerals, the former being attached to his lineage.[13] Apart from the Buyya, there are feminine counterparts to all, and this is true of the following. There are five sorts of Kuranmaran, not all of whom can be accurately called shamans, as will be apparent immediately: 1) the Raudkumbmaran, the one who "faints", is a shaman married to a tutelary in the Under World, he learns his duties in dream and trance, he is qualified to perform the great rituals and deals with routine matters as well; generally, however, he does not assist at funerary rites "or in such ceremonies as the Ajorapur"; 2) The Guarkumbmaran,

[11] Briggs, *Doms*, *passim*.

[12] Studying deified women among Kallar, Dumont has been led to speak in the last analysis of "some degree of a substitution of a divine for a human marriage" (*op. cit.*, p. 395).

[13] "Family" in the author's language.

although married to a tutelary, is largely confined to funerary ceremonies and dealings with the dead, i.e. he is a shaman of inferior rank; 3) the specialists of Ajorapur and similar rites are usually incapable of trance, i.e. they are not shamans, but ritual specialists; the same is true of 4), diviners using mechanical means only, and 5), medicine-men (p. 128-132).

On this, two remarks may be made. First, the distinctions with regard to funerary functions divide the shamans proper into two categories and distinguish ritual specialists in charge of "menial duties" only, the Idaimaran and Siggamaran. This is the more important, for it is not expressed in terms of impurity, and, on the other hand, as we shall see later on, gods and ancestors cannot be distinguished in their essence. The division of labour is between a number of ritual specialists, some of whom combine the making of offerings with possession while others do not; priesthood and possession are not primarily opposed, the content of the category of Kuranmaran seems to be that of ritual specialists, including shamans, as opposed to village chiefs and funerary menials.

We cannot here go into the detail of the life of the shaman and shamanin, interesting though it is. Some of them lead a double married life, one half in this world, one half in the Under World, where they may have children as well. There is of course some amount of rivalry between the two worlds, but strikingly little,[14] especially in a context in which the interdependence of spirits and men is institutionalized as a conflict of greediness versus niggardliness. We cannot dwell on the excellent description of trance. A few words quoted from Curt Sachs admirably describe the dance of possessed dancers in India:

> a "state of forceful flexion and relaxation of the muscles which may lead to a throwing about of the body in wild paroxysms. The will has ... lost control. ... This condition is therefore not an activity, but a suffering" (p. 216).

The funerary rites illustrate the theory of double obsequies (see above, p. 11). From the moment of death, the dead person's spirit is a "shade" until the second obsequies, the Guar ceremony, is performed, when it becomes an ancestor.

> The theory is that the shade is hungry, cold and naked – and untouchable – until the Guar is performed, and that it reveals its dissatisfaction by making members of the family ill or by killing their cattle until they do their duties The shades are, in fact, a great nuisance ... (p. 360).)[15]

[14] The antagonism is marked in the case of Guar shamanins, who cannot be married in this world, at least before being officially recognized (p. 146); otherwise it is mild.

[15] This passage hardly justifies the author in describing the condition of the soul apart from, and long before the description of, the rites for the dead (p. 66 sq., p. 339

or, as an informant puts it, in a Hindu language:

In the days before the Guar began, the shades of dead men had to live separate in the Under World, just as Doms and Ghasis are not touched by the Hindus ... [they] said "We are the Doms, the Untouchables, of the Under World ...".

Most funerary rites are a matter of the lineage; the lineage has its specialists of menial duties (except perhaps the Siggamaran, who combines the functions which, among Tamil Hindus, are those of the grave-digger or scavenger, and of the barber), its burning-ground, its group of menhirs made up of the stones erected at the Guar for each of the departed. Guar means the "planting of a stone"[16] and

The Guar is a ceremony of the utmost importance; it is the central rite round which the entire elaborate fabric of Saora sacrifice is built. It is the means by which the shade is admitted to the company of the ancestral dead and given the freedom of the Under World (p. 358).

It consists essentially in sacrificing a buffalo – often actually several, some being given by affinal relatives or friends, and the gift returned in similar but inverse circumstances – and erecting a new stone close by the cluster of those of the lineage. The meat of the sacrificed buffaloes is the object of elaborate and solemnized exchanges. A description shows the ancestors, summoned by the shamanin, beginning to "throng round the menhirs" and possessing her in turn (p. 372–375). Obviously we have here one of the climaxes of Saora religion. In another description, we see the shamanin calling on the dead and staying on the spot for five hours (p. 369); it is difficult to avoid the impression that the shaman here is still to some degree a psychopomp, one of his common functions (see above, p. 64, note 2).

It is a characteristic of Saora religion, however, that the dead, even after the Guar – and other, collective, ceremonies[17] – do not cease to be harmful, in appearance at least, just as the gods themselves are harmful.

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sq.). The informants point to the relation even in the detail: immediately after death the soul goes to the Under World where it is not admitted; they make it stand "until the corpse is burnt and the bones removed, whereupon they send it back to earth... It is when the mourners see the discoloration of the charred bones that they know that the soul has returned" (p. 66).

[16] A widespread feature in Hindu India, although it is not done for every deceased person. For instance, among the Tamil-speaking people of Tinnevelly District, when a dead person possesses somebody of the lineage and demands a cult, a stone is set up in his or her name in the lineage temple and this is called *satti* (*śakti*) *niruttudal*: "to erect the power" (Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 405).

[17] The Karja is intended for all the recent dead of the village.

In matters of fertility as well as in matters of health, both the dead and the gods are believed to interfere with the desirable course of events; They have to be placated in order to turn them away from harming men, or crops. In the agricultural ritual, from the consecration of seed to the first-fruits offerings, although the hill gods play a role (see above, p. 66), the dead are very much in evidence. This can be taken as a particular case of the very widespread relation between the dead and the growing of the crops, but Verrier Elwin insists on the negative aspect of their intervention:

> ... there can be no doubt that the general Saora view of the effect of the dead on the harvest is that it is a negative one. If the dead are satisfied, they will not interfere with the normally beneficient purposes of nature, and they will protect the harvest from its other enemies. Just as there are no health-giving, but only disease-giving, gods, and the most man can do to keep in good health is to persuade the disease-givers to let him alone, so in relation to the crops, gods and dead alike are thought of as fertility-destroying but not as fertility-promoting (p. 302).

To put it bluntly, this is too narrow a view, and we would rather say that the dead and the gods are powerful in matters of fertility and health,[18] and that the negative form of their intervention is not due to their particular relation to these things in Saora belief, but rather to the form which their interdependence with men takes in Saora religion. This may seem obscure and must be made explicit. The dead are believed to lead a poor life in the Under World, and they are largely dependent upon sacrifices for their maintenance: "The dead do not want to trouble the living; they are driven to it by necessity, sometimes even by affection" (as when a dead man claims his widow in the Under World to keep him company and care for him), or again they are "... not wicked ... rather pathetic ... for they have to act out of character to get anything they want" (p. 227). What are the motives which excite gods to interfere with people's health? They are of three kinds. First, they react against neglect, disobedience, breach of taboo: "Sickness is the routine punishment for every mistake and crime in relation to the gods." (p. 223). Second, and this is said to be very common, "the gods are hungry and need food and shelter; men will not give them... unless they have to; the gods therefore put pressure on them by making them ill" (*ibid.*). Thirdly, there can be no motive at all, and "The Saoras do not like these mysterious unmotivated attacks, which make them feel that there is no order or logic in the world. Wherever possible the shamans attribute

[18] The author recognizes that rites for the dead assist the crops (p. 303).

a reason for an illness" (*ibid.*). (It may be noticed that this is the case especially in very serious and incurable diseases: the responsible god is identified, but there is no remedy). Let it be noted also that the gods have a very close relation to disease, often for each one an association with one particular disease, to the point that "in many cases the only thing a Saora can say about a god is to name the disease he gives" (p. 221).

To sum up, the dead and the gods are dependent upon men for their maintenance, and men are dependent upon them for their crops and their health. Moreover, Saoras are in the habit of forgetting the dreams which the dead send them, and even formal promises once made, they try to postpone the Guar, etc. (It is true that the expenses are considerable, the more so as often buffaloes have to be sacrificed, and they must be bought from the Doms.) The fact is that in the interdependence between the two, or three, worlds, there is very little of the nature of a contract ensuring a smooth execution of obligations on both sides; instead, much is left to the initiative of the most powerful party, who has to be as demanding as the other is negligent. Coertion is normal, and this is why the spirits appear as acting *against* man: it is an aspect of a close interdependence which is not contractually settled.[19] From this point of view, what our author calls the "xenophobic" aspect of Saora religion (p. 302, 490), the insistence on "Leave us alone", is perhaps an exaggeration. It is normal to find elaborate farewell rituals at the end of great festivals (harvest, p. 334), and we know also from Hindu India examples of disease deities being taken to the village boundary and expelled, after they have been worshipped and feasted.[20] We shall come back to the question below.

It is possible to proceed a little further about the similarity between the dead and the gods and, through it, about the nature of Saora spiritual beings. Actually the definition of "gods" is not very satisfactory. We read that, on the strength of a native word, there are several kinds of "gods": a) the ancestors or the dead (after the performance of the second obsequies); b) the tutelaries (dead of superior status); c) the "gods" proper (many of them purely malevolent); d) the Kittungs, most of whom are not worshipped, but one of which, a collective deity, is important and the object of a widespread cult (the word Kittung is said

[19] The first-fruits offerings is an exception. The idea of the two kinds of relations between the dead and the living is from Professor Lévi-Strauss in unpublished lectures.
[20] This recalls how near we are here to the situation in popular Hinduism, in which the so-called malevolent character of deities has been so often stressed.

to mean "god" also by itself, p. 111) (p. 77–78). Leaving aside the question of Kittung, we shall, in order to maintain the relations between the native categories, speak of "spirits" (although the word in itself may not be satisfactory). Indeed we have occasionally done so already in the foregoing. We have, then, among the spirits, different categories: the (spirits of the) dead, the tutelaries, the spirits pure and simple [and perhaps the Kittung(s) spirit(s)]. The spirits pure and simple are connected mainly with diseases, with hills, and with other natural objects. The connection may be multiple: the spirit(s) of the sun is (are) connected with certain diseases. Now it is essential to remark that there are two kinds of death: one may die by being called to join a dead relative (or a tutelary), and in this case one goes to the Under World, or one may die through the intervention of a disease-spirit, and then one joins what we may call the Upper World, on the earth or above it, and one becomes merged into this disease-spirit, be it the sun spirit, or smallpox, or the tiger spirit.[21] One sees that our "spirits pure and simple" appear to be made up to a large extent of the spirits of dead Saoras. Actually there is a sort of gradual shading off from the category of the "dead" to that of "gods" or, as one is tempted to call them, specialized spirits. We have seen that their manifestations follow the same pattern. There is hardly any real difference in their nature.[22] To speak of "dead" and "gods" would be misleading as the stuff of which they are made is, clearly in the case of disease-spirits, the same. It is true that the spirit of a man who died of smallpox loses its individuality as it becomes merged into the smallpox spirit. This spirit, although it appears as an individual spirit, is in turn made up, at least in part, of the spirits of all the people it killed; it is a collective being called by a single name.

This is not the only case; we have mentioned above the fact that Kittung is a collective deity, and more evidence could be adduced. It is perhaps not unreasonable, then, to attempt to generalize and suppose, not only that Saora deities in general are collective spirits, but also that what the Saoras are essentially dealing with is not a collection of individual spirits but a vast and complex, essentially multiple spiritual being, from which apparent individualities detach themselves when occasion demands. The hypothesis will appear likely if we can relate each

[21] Instead of disease, one should speak of a specialized death agent.

[22] We understand then how Kittung is at the same time a culture hero and a high god (see above, p. 63). There is abundant evidence in the evocations in support of this view, and of the collective nature of deities: even when a festival is offered to one particular spirit, many are summoned.

apparition, each individuation, to specific circumstances. What do we see? The spirits of the hills are individuated in connection with the surrounding cultivating villages, which can unite for their worship. The tutelary spirits are individuated in connection with the individual shaman whom they marry. The spirits of the dead remain individual essentially in connection with people of their lineage, although they can possess any shaman with the help of his tutelary. Each spirit of disease, as we have seen, is individuated in connection with one special cause of death. The spirits of prominent natural objects like the sun are individuated in connection, perhaps with those objects themselves, but also with different aspects of their relation to men. The "Sun God" is male and female, Uyungsum and Uyungboi. "It is probable that [its other] names are intended to emphasize different qualities: ... Darammaboi ... the 'righteous' character of the sun; Gadejangboi stresses his creative power; and Lankasum refers to his abode 'above'" (p. 126). To be complete, one should also refer to the myths in which spirits appear in connection with rituals, etc. On the whole, we perceive that the individuation of spirits is intimately connected with the form of interdependence between them and men, and with the means of communication, i.e. shamanistic possession. In particular, "gods" are so closely connected with disease because, in relation to diagnosis and treatment, disease is the main agency of their individuation. Also, we can see why the spirits are apparently uniformly malevolent; it is because they come into existence in the process of diagnosis by the shamans; there is no need for diagnosis in beneficent effects and designs. The character of those spiritual beings who are objects of worship is not a final datum *sui generis*, but it can be correlated, sociologically, with the institution through which contact with them is attained. The broad Saora situation does not seem so different from that of Hinduism as it actually exists in the villages of India. The dead shade into the gods[23] in a very similar manner. Belief also bears in fact not on individual beings but on a multiple entity (but, it is true, the Hindu multiplicity rests in the last analysis on the necessary duality of opposites). Deities have also been described as predominantly malevolent.

This general similarity links well with the importance on both sides of possession or the oracular function. Saora possession has shamanistic

[23] This should not be taken to imply that belief in gods has developed from the belief in ghosts, as was sometimes advanced in an evolutionary perspective. In Hinduism, the category of gods is given, and it is in this framework that the dead can merge with the gods.

features, but it is characteristic that the Saora shamanin gets her powers through the most Hindu connection, i.e. marriage, with a Hindu dead. One does not see how this tribal religion could possibly be considered apart, as an "animism" opposed to "Hinduism". It is interesting to note that outwardly the Saoras maintain their autonomy, and consequently have not submitted to the intricacies of pure and impure, while inwardly they recognize the prestige of their neighbours.

APPENDIX

A STRUCTURAL DEFINITION OF A FOLK DEITY OF TAMIL NAD: AIYANAR, THE LORD[1]

For the European observer, the god Aiyanar[2] presents a problem. His ill-defined personality seems to contradict his prominent position in Tamil villages. It is not that nothing is known of him, but his characteristics seem to be chosen at random, so that his nature cannot be grasped through them. In order to solve this problem and to define without making arbitrary assumptions the inconsistent picture which emerges from the literature, I propose in this paper to study the god less in himself than in the relations he maintains in the village pantheon. I shall draw upon data collected at first hand in some localities of Madura District (Kokkulam, in Tirumangalam taluk) and Ramnad District (Kamuthi, Mudukkulattur taluk). Although the method is generally applicable, and the basic relations involved prevail very widely, the conclusions do not bear automatically for other areas. Even the neighbouring Tinnevelly District would probably require some adaptation. As to the deities of Kerala or Mysore who are sometimes considered as homologous to Aiyanar, they are left out altogether.

THE PROBLEM

Three main authors have studied the god at first hand or dicussed him at length. The description of Ziegenbalg, a Danish missionary in Tranquebar (Tanjore District) belongs to the first half of the 18th century.

[1] This is a slightly adapted translation of an article in French ("Définition structurale d'un dieu populaire tamoul") by L. Dumont, in *Journal Asiatique*, t. 241, 1953, p. 255-270.

[2] It is the main name in the area. In written Tamil *aiyaNār*, locally often *aiyēN*, *aiyeNār*, even *aiya(r)*; *sāstā* (not *sāttaN*) is the main name in Tinnevelly, and sometimes in Ramnad.

It was used later by Oppert, Professor of Sanskrit at Madras, who completed it with the addition of sanskrit mantras, but added arbitrary speculations of his own. Finally, Bishop Whitehead, in a little book which contains some excellent descriptions of village cults, discusses the god from a theoretical point of view in Tanjore and Trichinopoly Districts. A brief summary of these three authors will reveal the problem.[3]

On the one hand we are told that the god has his temple in almost all the villages (which is true), and that he is the principal, and the sole male, divinity of the villages (which seems less true, but allowance has perhaps to be made for regional differences). But on the other hand, who is this universally found god, and whence comes his pre-eminence? To these questions our authors give two different answers. Oppert is quite arbitrary: for him the god is autochtonous or Dravidian, an eater of blood offerings, chief among the demons, a masculine counterpart of the Mother Goddess as represented by the village goddesses.[4] Whitehead takes an opposite view: for him, Aiyanar is a Brahmanic god, or a strongly brahmanized one, to whom such sacrifices are not offered and who is opposed in this matter to the village goddesses, whom alone he considers to be Dravidian. So much so that the cult of Aiyanar in the Tamil country would be an index of greater brahmanization, as compared to the Telugu country.[5] Such discrepancies may be due in part to insufficient observation or to local variations, which are possible, as we shall see. But they result first of all from hasty interpretations rooted in the idea, which has done so much harm, that Indian culture is merely a juxtaposition of Aryan and so-called Dravidian or other elements. In order to overcome this fault, we shall attempt to get a more reliable view of the data by insisting upon the god's double relation, which has already appeared in the above, with the "demons" on the one hand and the goddesses on the other.

[3] B. Ziegenbalg (English transl.), *Genealogy of the South Indian Gods* (Madras, 1869), p. 133-135; G. Oppert, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or India* (Westminster, 1893), p. 450, 454, 504-510; H. Whitehead (Bishop R.R.), *The Village Gods of South India* (Calcutta, 1921).

[4] Other authors have held similar views: T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (Madras, 1914-1916), II, 2, p. 487; Jouveau-Dubreuil, *Iconography* (Paris, 1937), p. 123; J. Boulnois, *Le Caducée* (Paris, 1939), p. 148.

[5] Whitehead, *op. cit.*, p. 17-18, 33, 89. The view is nearer to the truth. The assumption that the goddesses have nothing to do with Brahmanism, and that their nature is different from that of Aiyanar is arbitrary. The same author is more cautious elsewhere (ch. viii). Cf. Slater, *Some South Indian Villages* (London, 1918), Glossary, p. 246 (Aiyanar as benevolent and vegetarian opposed to malevolent goddesses; the god is a meat-eater in the same author's *The Dravidian Element*, London, 1924, p. 93).

If Aiyanar's essence is doubtful, what are in fact his main characteristics? In oral tradition, he was born from Shiva seduced by the feminine form assumed by Vishnu in order to free him from a threatening Asura. Oppert gives a good version of the episode together with a wrong commentary: there is no justification for speaking of "incest" (in popular tradition and elsewhere Vishnu and Shiva are brothers-in-law), nor for supposing that the Brahmans invented this "disgusting" story in order to degrade Aiyanar.[6] We shall find that the story has quite another function.

Aiyanar may be represented either as a warrior, on foot or riding a white elephant or a horse, or seated between his two wives, carrying a sceptre or whip and wearing the meditation band.[7] The Seven Mothers or Seven Virgins are sometimes mentioned as present in his temple. Outside are found big terracotta horses. These are offered to the god and his suite for his nocturnal rounds. The escort is composed either of the god's generals or vassals or of demons. The troop riding in mid-air in the night recalls the well-known theme of the Wild Hunt, but here it is a matter of watching the village land, of which Aiyanar is first of all the guardian. The god also has to do occasionally with the rain, and in any case his temple is usually situated on the bank of the tank in which rainwater is gathered for irrigation purposes. There may be a daily cult, and there is a yearly festival, when blood sacrifice is offered, either to the god himself or to his attendants.[8]

Most of the authors take Aiyanar to be "the king of the demons". A *District Gazetteer* gives a formula which, as we shall see, is much better, of Aiyanar's relation with the demons: "He is their master although he is not one of them".[9]

[6] Oppert, *op. cit.*, p. 508-509. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Rudra similarly falls in love with the beautiful girl – Vishnu – who has just retrieved the ambrosia from the Asuras (8.8.41-8.9.27); cf. G. Rao, *op. cit.*, according to whom the *Suprabedhāgama* mentions at this place the birth of Sasta. For the in-law relationship, see G. Rao, *ibid.*, I, 2, 337, who refers to the *Devīmāhātmya*. The scene representing Vishnu giving his sister in marriage to Shiva is a common theme in the iconography of the great brahmanical temples (Madura, etc.).

[7] A cloth girdle circling behind the back and keeping upwards the knees of a sitting person, Skrt. *yogapaṭṭa* (Ziegenbalg: *vāgupaṭṭai*; Jouveau-Dubreuil: *bāhupaddai*). According to Gopinatha Rao, this accessory is found on images of Narasimha (I, 150), Brahma (I, 253), Kshama (I, 367), Dakshinamurti (II, 284-289), and a rishi (II, 320). Cf. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, 2, p. 962.

[8] Summed up from the authors mentioned above (notes 3 and 4); also H. Krishna Sastri, *South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses* (Madras, 1916), p. 229-233 (reprod.); my own observations.

[9] H. R. Pate, *Tinnevelly District Gazetteer*, Vol. I (Madras, 1917). The description

AIYANAR AND THE VILLAGE GODDESS

If the association of Aiyanar and the Village Goddess does not appear in the preceding summary, this is because it appears only in their local functions: the goddess is also concerned with the protection, or prosperity, of the village. To be more precise, we should first of all remove the misunderstanding which arise from the use of such terms as "village god", "mother goddess" or "mother goddess of the village". The term "village god" is ambiguous because it can signify either the gods who have their temples in the village (which has a social implication, opposing as it does the popular gods to the so to say official gods of the Brahmanic temples), or it can signify more strictly the gods of the local community. There is a difference between the two, for gods and temples are found in the village that interest only a part of the inhabitants. There are lineage temples among one and the same caste, and there are temples belonging to other castes.[10] The question which decides the issue is: "Who participates in the collection which covers the expenses of the festival?" If each household in the village takes part, strangers being excluded, then, and only then, are we dealing with a village cult in the strict sociological sense. In general, the female deities which our authors call "village goddesses" are of this nature: there is one, or several of them, in each village, in whose cult the whole community collaborates and from whom it derives benefit. But if, going a step further, we are told to regard these goddesses as identical with the village in the sense of being eponymous goddesses, or if we are invited to qualify them, in what appears to be an analogous manner, as "mother goddesses", then we should be on our guard. In reading Whitehead's work, which for the greater part is devoted to them, we might get the impression that each of these goddesses is necessarily peculiar to one village. On the contrary, in one region there is a relatively small number of them, each one being generally honoured in several places, some of them from one end of the country to the other.[11] Their essential function is the protection of the village against epidemics, and one of the most widely

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of religion is excellent, but, as we said at the beginning, the district is slightly different from ours. See also *South-Arcot Gazetteer*, p. 99-100. This series of volumes is an invaluable, often the only, first-hand source.

[10] There are also gods reserved for the private devotion of individuals, like certain images of Pilleiyar (Ganesha).

[11] They can therefore not be called "local", except in the extremely limited sense that their geographical spread is less than that of the great brahmanical deities. Whitehead has examples of borrowing from one locality to another (p. 23). *Contra*, see W. Th. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (Madras, 1925), *passim*.

spread is *māriyammaN* or *māriyammei*, the smallpox goddess. A linguistic fact has played a part in the identification of these goddesses as "mothers". Their name is generally a compound, the second part of which, as in the preceding example, is very like *ammā(ḷ)* which in kinship terminology designates, among others, the mother. But *ammā(ḷ)* refers also, in the language of politeness, to all women and girls. For instance, divinized virgins (*kaNNi*) are so called. Rather than translating *māriammaN* as "Death-Mother",[12] we shall call her Smallpox Lady. While it is true that the village places itself under the protection of such a Lady, it does not follow that it honours her as a (or its) Mother.[13]

It is advisable to interpret Aiyanar in the same manner. Certainly *aiyaN*, *aiya(r)* (Sanskrit *ārya*) is "father", but it is also an equivalent of "Sir" and, as we shall see, a name for the Brahmans. If *aiyaNār* is opposed to *ammaN* (locally also *aiyēN-ammaN*) it is as the Lord or Master to the Lady and not exactly as the father to the mother (locally *aiya-amma*).[14] This is confirmed by observation: there is no question here of these deities being coupled together as husband and wife, as is so frequently the case. Their temples are distinct and the one deity is not represented in the other's temple: Aiyanar's wives are altogether different. If the two deities are complementary by sex and name, this is in connection with their relation to the village, with the role they both play in its prosperity. Even their priests are different. While the goddess' priest is usually a *paṇḍāram* (garland-maker), a vegetarian, a sort of imitation of a Brahman, the priest of Aiyanar is the potter who makes images and horses, a meat-eater and the authenthic priest of meat-eaters (Madura and Ramnad Districts).

A concrete example will show how Aiyanar and the Goddess are actually brought together in ritual. In Kokkulam and in the neighbouring localities the festival of *vaḍakku vāsal selli ammaN*, the Lady of the North Gate, is celebrated in the month of *puraṭṭāsi* (September-October) in rough synchronism with the great Hindu festival of the Goddess (*navarāttri*, the Nine "Nights"). The ceremonies are spread over several days

[12] Cf. L. Renou & J. Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique*, t. I, p. 487. This is an etymological rendering from Sanskrit *māri*, death). But the meaning is neither present nor implied for Tamil villagers, for whom *māri* means only smallpox.

[13] This is said only about the fundamental nature of the goddesses. It does not mean that any maternal shade of meaning is absent. For some more detail, see my *Une sous-caste*, p. 388 sq.

[14] The terms for goddess and for mother or lady are so close to each other that the dictionaries are likely to give a wrong impression of identity. I believe that, within a given group at a given time, the two can always be distinguished by different endings. The same holds true on the male side.

and the cult of Aiyanar follows on the day after that of the Lady.[15] The one removes the disease (that is the reason for the orientation of her temple towards the north, and her name), the other seems, with his temple on the banks of the tank, to be concerned with the prosperity of the fields. It is difficult in these localities to get at a more precise value or function; the date of the cult of Aiyanar is probably different in those places where he acts explicitly as rain-maker.[16]

Two facts give occasion to insist upon Aiyanar in his male aspect, identical in that respect with Shiva, as the myth of his birth indicates. Like his father he is identified with the linga on one side and with the bull on the other.

At Kokkulam I collected a version of the Aiyanar birth story very close to that reported by Oppert. Moreover, this is a widespread story. In this account, Shiva's semen is, with the cooperation of the Black God, deposited on the bank of the tank for its protection. There, it assumes the form of the linga. If the latter has disappeared in our time, this is said to be because the cult it requires is too complicated. But it exists, and one could find it if one were to dig in the earth beneath the present anthropomorphic image of the god. The idea is also found elsewhere.

The bull is well known to be Shiva's vehicle, honoured as Nandi in Shivaite temples. The villagers identify the two; thus in Kokkulam a bull, attached to a lineage temple and exclusively used for stud services, lives practically at liberty and on occasion charges the carts on the road; the villagers, referring to these bursts of temper, smilingly call their author *sivaN*. One kind of bull race, witnessed in a neighbouring village, is known from the literature. It is a rather profane and sportive occasion, similar to the "courses à la cocarde" of Provence. But apart from this *jalli-kaṭṭu*, I found, under the name *erudu kaṭṭu* (to tie the bull), a different sort of race.[17] In Kokkulam as well as in Kamuthi, where I observed one, the race is dedicated to Aiyanar and takes place near his temple the morning after the erection of the terracotta horses. A huge rope made by the Untouchables is tied at one end to the bull's neck, while the other end is allowed to trail far behind him in such a manner that it hampers his movements. The young men try to master the bull by seizing the rope. In this manner, one after the other and in hierarchical order, the bulls of the local notables are brought into the game. At the

[15] Similar associations in Whitehead: *op. cit.*, p. 92, 93, 101, 107.

[16] As in the region of Kamuthi.

[17] This is mentioned in Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, I, p. 90. It has also a technical parallel in the south of France (my *Tarasque*, Paris, 1951, Ph. Pl. X).

end the rope is left looped up in a tree near the temple. In both associations, with the linga and with the bull, Aiyanar appears as a double of Shiva. However, we note a first difference: just as the linga is said to be buried, the sexual aspect of Aiyanar is latent and applied, rather than affirmed and celebrated, as the couple the god forms with the Goddess exists only in relation to the village.

That a couple appears in this way, on a functional level, says much in favour of the depth of the notion.[18] Still, when confronted with explicit couples, like Shiva and his consort, in Hinduism, some writers have been at pains to "explain" them by a sort of accidental reunion of two deities of opposite sex.[19] If, on the contrary, one admits for a while that the couple is a religious entity, then one can take in both some tribal religions and well-known Hindu figures, as well as our Tamil village deities. Among the Maria Gonds of Bastar the male clan god is associated in each village of the clan with a different goddess, the mother of the village, so that there is a couple of gods in each village, the male element of the couple being the same in all villages of the same clan.[20] In orthodox Hinduism the same Shiva has different wives in different towns, as Kamakshi in Conjeeveram, Minakshi in Madura. (It is true that the god change his name in each place, but he is everywhere the same while his wife on the other hand is conceived of each time as a distinct incarnation of Parvati). Half-way between these two cases, in our Tamil villages, we can observe the local functions divided between a god and a goddess. Aiyanar is the same everywhere (although he can always be distinguished by a different name). The goddess is neither different in each village, nor is she everywhere the same. She is not the goddess of the village except in a functional sense. Beneath the differ-

[18] The division of labour between our two gods is much like that between father and mother in the conjugal family, and more generally like the pattern of leadership in small groups according to Bales' experiments: a leader No 1 being in charge of the relation of the group with the environment while a leader No 2 deals with the group itself (in our case, means of livelihood for Aiyanar, health, and collective health in particular, for the goddess); see Talcott Parsons, R. F. Bales and E. A. Shils, *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (Glencoe, Ill., 1953).

[19] How arbitrary the procedure can be appears in the case of Shiva and his consort (Minakshi) in Madura according to Elmore, *op. cit.*, p. 83. The descriptions of Whitehead and Elmore establish that goddesses predominate on the local functional level in the Telugu country; they do not establish that village deities in the wider sense are "almost exclusively feminine", and still less that "Dravidian" people worshipped only goddesses. These authors have probably underestimated the male principle to some extent. Cf. concerning the male deity Potu Razu: Whitehead, p. 18, 40; Elmore, p. 17, 92, etc.

[20] W. V. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar* (1938), p. 196-197.

ences in personalities and functions, the couple is present from one end of the chain to the other, and the diversity in the forms which the couple takes only bears witness to the reality of the category, whether overt or implied.

AIYANAR ASSOCIATED WITH THE "BLACK GOD"

This second association is still more important than the first. In order to understand it, let us temporarily leave Aiyanar and sum up what can be called the structure of the lineage pantheons. The descriptions of the lineage temples belonging to the Pramalai Kallar in Kokkulam will be our source. These people, or rather some specialists among them, have more precise ideas than others on the subject, and one can verify the principles which they express in many less theologically minded groups. It is in the lineage temples, where the priests are Kallar, that the pantheon is most numerous and best articulated.[21] These temples comprise at least twenty-one gods, all present at the time of the annual cult, whether or not they are otherwise identifiable by representations or plain stones. These gods are classed into two categories: on the one hand, the pure (*suttam*) gods who do not eat meat, and on the other, the meat-eating gods who are impure (*asuttam*) for this reason. This opposition bears some relation to a distinction often made in the literature between gods of Brahmanic origin and inspiration, borrowed from the large official temples, and local or popular gods, often called "demons" by the authors. But such formulas are not rigorous; we must stick to the clear distinction applied by the worshippers themselves, which bears on diet. It has a social implication which will be emphasized later.

The opposition between vegetarian and meat-eating gods is strongly marked; it is expressed in a real dichotomy in space, in the priesthood and in the cult implements. The temple is oriented towards the East and the chapel sheltering the principal god is situated almost on the East-West axis; the vegetarian gods are to the North (brahmanism, as they say, came from the North), and the meat-eating gods to the South. Next, in view of the two different kinds of food to be served, it is best to have two kitchens, two priests (a "great" priest and a "little" priest, otherwise serious complications are to be expected), and also two sets of implements as well as two boxes to keep them and shelter the divine in its latent form in the interval between two festivals. The opposition

[21] For details, see *Une Sous-caste*, p. 357 sq.

is marked also in legends such as that in which the main local god opposes with extreme violence the attempt of a Brahmanic trinity to establish itself in his neighbourhood, but is finally forced to give in. More dramatic perhaps is the legend which depicts the confusion of a man in whom are incarnate at the same time a vegetarian and a meat-eating god – both, however, present in an entirely regular and even necessary manner – until an arbitrator ascribes to them respectively the right and the left sides of the man's body. We might take this as a symbol of the necessity of the co-existence of the two poles of the opposition: the body of the possessed man is divided like the temple, the divine is a whole constituted by this fundamental opposition itself.

This structure of the divine needs to be considered in relation to the social order. It is clear that the relation between the vegetarian and the meat-eating deities is of the same order as that between vegetarian and meat-eating men. The criterion of diet is one of the main criteria in the hierarchical ordering of castes in South India. The two kinds of gods of which the temple is composed are in the relation of superior caste (the Brahman caste for example) to inferior caste (that of the meat-eating devotees in our case). Moreover, the distinction is a particular form of the opposition of purity and impurity, the principle of the caste system. Finally, the temple reflects the society in a simplified form, it symbolizes it. This is probably the reason for what might appear at first sight as a strange syncretism.

Hence, important consequences follow. Not only are pure and impure gods as closely interdependent as pure and impure castes are, but we can say something about the degree and nature of the belief bearing on the two kinds of gods and on the rites addressed to them. The people are meat-eaters, and in their lineage temples, where they themselves officiate, the essential rite is blood-sacrifice. There is no doubt that they identify themselves only with the impure gods who occupy a position in the pantheon homologous to their own position in society. These are, it would seem, *their* gods, and they believe in them more immediately. Why therefore are they not content with them, and why do they install in addition pure gods that, by their own confession, they serve badly and frequently annoy? Gods of whom it cannot be said that they are, in their worshippers' ideas, intrinsically more powerful? One might speak here of imitation or, following Hocart, of "snobbery". It is true that among those groups the cult of the pure gods is shot through with a certain pharisaism, that belief in them is relatively conventional, that in the last analysis the pure god is not present in the

temple by virtue of his intrinsic superiority, but as *the god of the superior castes*. It would appear as if the caste joins to its own gods those of the castes that dominate it. For a psychology of conversion, we have here to substitute a psychology of imitation and addition.

This again is not enough, for the inferior meat-eating gods themselves only exist by the sanction, the guarantee of the superior gods. Only the presence of the latter maintains the reality of the former. The same legend which praises the omnipotence and widens beyond all measure the domain of a Black God, also recognizes that he was originally the servant of a great Brahmanic god. As regards the nature of this Black God, the village theologian engages in a complicated but revealing discussion. On the one hand, the Black God is identical with one of those evil demons, *pēy*, who have only an ephemeral existence and are not the object of any cult; on the other hand, he rules by virtue of a sort of proxy of the great (vegetarian) gods, and one is even told that he takes on his black, demonic appearance only in order to deceive the demons whom he fights. (This is clearly the position of the castes of intermediary status: they have no being, they do not exist for themselves but are opposed in turn to the Brahmans like non-being to being and to the Untouchables as being to non-being, solidary in the first place with all those who are below them and in the second with all who are above). One can see that the illogicality of a dichotomy in the divine does not entirely escape the indigenous mind, which sees it as a contradiction between affectivity (identification with the Black God) and speculation (the pure god is supreme). This contradiction reflects the social position of the meat-eater: he must not only recognize the superiority of the vegetarian but even admit that he derives his own reality from him.

This is important from a theoretical point of view: we can say in a particularly strict sense that here a characteristic does not exist except in its relation to its opposite. In the caste society, nothing is true by nature, everything by situation, there are no essences but only relations. To say caste is to say structure. Hence comes the often recognized impossibility of universal judgements in India: as long as one considers particular objects – instead of relations – no consistency, no principle can be found.

We are now in a position to return to Aiyanar. The opposition described is met with again, under an exemplary form, in the relation of Aiyanar as a pure, vegetarian god, to a meat-eating god locally called the Black God, *kaRuppu-sāmi* or *kaRuppaN*. In fact, these names can be seen as referring to categories rather than to individual gods: each concrete Aiyanar or Karuppu has his own particular name. This pair

constitutes the simplest and most concentrated illustration of the divine as we have defined it. This is expressed most clearly in the Karuppu temples, where most often the central shrine is double, one part sheltering Karuppu and the other Aiyanar. In this context Aiyanar appears as condensing Brahmanism in his person; in him Shivaism and Vishnuism are not distinguished but, on the contrary, blended as they were at his birth. If he is a duplicate of Shiva, it is an enlarged duplicate, which transcends the distinction of the two great gods of Hinduism. Also, in the story of his birth the interdependence of castes is vigourously marked: the two great gods are embarrassed by the semen of one of them, and "just as important people sometimes have need of a sweeper", in the same way they call for Karuppan and extricate themselves from the affair with his assistance.

Aiyanar and Karuppan are as master and servant, and while being opposed they participate the one in the other. Thus, at the time of the festival when terracotta horses are offered, at least a pair must be given: one for Aiyanar, to whose nature alone the gift is befitting, as we shall see presently, but another also for Karuppan who accompanies him (this corresponds to the legitimization of the lower gods already mentioned). Conversely, the blood-sacrifice which is properly offered only to Karuppan can, if it is offered in Aiyanar's temple, appear to apply to him also. Here is the contradiction which we promised to solve at the outset. There are in fact two ways of seeing the main god of a temple. He can be looked at either in himself or as embracing all the deities which surround him, vegetarian and meat-eating deities together. In the first case, a curtain is drawn before Aiyanar at the time of blood-sacrifice to isolate him from it; in the second case, it would seem to the observer, and indeed ordinary villagers themselves might say, that the sacrifice is offered to him. More generally, we can suppose that the pantheon tends to become homogeneous, the superior gods adopting the characteristics of the lower and *vice versa*. Thus, in the village the great gods become incarnate like the others in a possessed dancer. This tendency is held in check only in circumstances where the distinction is felt to be pertinent, as is the case here for the distinction in diet.

Aiyanar, then, commands the inferior gods, not because he is one of them, but precisely because he is different from them – such is hierarchy in the caste society. But at this point interesting complications arise. If, in the theory of caste, the first rank belongs to the Brahman, we can say that in the actuality the hierarchy is bicephalous, except that the second head, the king, is not recognized when confronted with

the first. Aiyar is the commonest name for the Brahman, and Aiyanar as his name indicates is above all a Brahman; he is vegetarian, he sometimes wears the sacred thread and more often the meditation band, and no doubt it is as such in the first place that he rules over the inferior gods. But the royal component is also present. He is, we were told, "the king of the demons", he holds a sceptre (or perhaps a whip), he has for his mount a white elephant or a horse (this is definitely a royal feature in South India), he is a warrior and his suite, sometimes said to be composed of "demons" – i.e. in our language inferior gods – is also represented as a body of feudatory horsemen (*pāḷeiyakkārar*, "poligar"). Also, as we shall see, he has two wives. To sum up, we can say that what characterizes Aiyanar is the union of these two series of features; in him the Brahman and the warrior king are blended. He is the Lord *par excellence*, first by his sacerdotal purity, but also by his temporal power.

CONCLUSION

The double association of the god, with the goddess on the one hand, with Karuppan on the other, is reflected in the calendar in some places as for instance in Kokkulam. The cult of Aiyanar occurs twice a year. While in the September festival it follows that of the goddess, in May-June, on the contrary, Aiyanar is associated with the Black God, and the festival in its full development comprises, on the first day, the erection of the clay horses mainly in the temple of the Black God, on the second day, the bull race in front of Aiyanar's temple. (Actually this entails large expenses and does not take place each year). The fact is not general, it is due here to the circumstance that the temples in Kokkulam have a dual value, as local temples (September) and as lineage temples, or more precisely as temples common to the seven local lineages (May).

It may well be imagined that the two fundamental oppositions which have helped us to define the nature of the god play more generally in a variety of ways. In fact, one may wonder whether the whole of South Indian society, at least according to the idea which the people themselves have of it, is not constructed on these two principles. In the present case it may be that their combination is also responsible for the fact that Aiyanar has two wives. This cannot be positively demonstrated, but it would be in accordance with a frequent pattern. According to Ziegenbalg, only one of Aiyanar's two consorts[22] bears on her brow the Shivaite

[22] The two wives are mostly known as *pūraṇei* and *puḍkalei* (Skrt. *pūrṇā*, *puṣkalā*, also *madanā* and *varnaṇī* according to G. Rao, *loc. cit.*).

mark. The triad would then combine the sexual couple with the lack of sectarian differentiation of the god which has been noted above. But this kind of triad is also found in the case of other gods. It is permissible to see in it a condensed picture of polygamy as consecrated by custom. In this case one of the two wives is normally of her husband's rank, the other of inferior rank, this combination being a royal, rather than a Brahmanic trait. The hypothesis seems verified when we learn that one of the wives has a clear complexion (high caste) and the other a dark complexion, as for Murugan-Subrahmanya between *deyvayāNei* (Skrt. *devasenā*) and *vaḷḷi*, for Vishnu between Lakshmi and Bhumidevi (in agreement with the royal aspect of Vishnu). More remotely one thinks of Krishna and Rukmini on the one hand, of Krishna and Radha on the other. Only, in the case of Aiyanar, we know nothing of the wives but their names, nothing, in particular, about their complexion.

To sum up, Aiyanar is the Lord: the Lord as complement of the Lady, the Lord as high caste god ruling low caste gods. High caste he is in a double manner: as a "pure" god transcending sectarian limitations, and as a king ruling his subordinates. He concentrates in himself the religion and the state at the level of the village, while at the same time keeping the value of a god attached to a particular place.

CORRESPONDENCE

FOR A SOCIOLOGY OF INDIA?

by F. G. Bailey

At our request Dr. F. G. Bailey, Lecturer in Asian Anthropology in the Department of Cultural Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, has formulated the following objections to the views proposed in Contributions No 1. We are most grateful for his cooperation.

We publish his critique without immediate comment and have simply added a few textual notes where it seems that Dr. Bailey has misunderstood our position as opposed to simple disagreement. The Editors

Since the rest of this paper will be a polemic (the editors' style is infectious), I will begin by congratulating Professor Dumont and Dr Pocock on their enterprise in founding *Contributions*. We are, I think, uniquely favoured in having a forum for theoretical discussion.

But, while applauding the venture, I consider that in style and content the first issue is unfortunate, and is likely, if the bias is not corrected, to deter other contributors and to leave the editors alone in their forum. I am not in sympathy with their point of view; their perspective is too narrow; and they have come near to defining "sociology" out of existence.

I hope that in a future issue of *Contributions* the editors will give me a chance to be constructive about questions which interest me. But before I can do so, I have to show that sociology is a wider field than the editors are prepared to admit, and that some of us are not comfortable in the strait-jacket they have designed for "Indian sociology".

I have found it difficult to understand the editors' point of view, and in so far as I do understand it, for the most part I do not sympathize with it. I use the word "sympathize" advisedly, because the selection of a point of view is sometimes made in that hinterland beyond the boundaries of scientific analysis and rational argument, where the disputants have no common ground and are thus unable to prove or disprove one another's point of view. A truly fundamental choice is something, about which, if we do not like it, we can only agree to differ. However, even if there is such a basic divergence, my essay should at least demonstrate that other points of view are possible.

So far as I understand the editors' point of view, it is this. The object of "Indian sociology" is to understand Indian society. "*Indian society*

as a whole [is] the true object of our study" (1/10).* Understanding is achieved by the abstraction of a system. The elements in this system are ideas – "our primary object is a system of ideas" (1/11).[1] The editors quote with approval from Mauss: "A sociological explanation is finished when one has seen *what it is* that people believe and think, and *who are* the people who believe and think that." (1/13). There are two levels of these ideas: "the principles that the people themselves give" (1/12), and behind these principles "necessary but implicit links" (1/12) which are unexpressed. The reader is invited here to make a careful distinction between two levels of abstraction, between the concepts which the people themselves have about their own society, and, at a higher level, concepts supplied by the anthropologist, so that he may organize popular concepts into a system. The first are a set of ideas or beliefs, for which vernacular terms exist, and which will be given to the anthropologist by any reasonably reflective and intelligent member of the society. The higher set of relationships is perceived by the anthropologist alone.

Before criticizing this point of view, let me first say that I entirely sympathize with the editors' efforts to dispel the "impression of immense complexity and inconsistency in Hindu life which appears to defy any kind of systematic understanding" (2/31), and I agree that our task is to bring order, through analysis, to the chaos of mere description. I also think, with the editors, that this analysis is carried out by means of concepts made by ourselves, and that we can never find a sufficiently systematic understanding in the concepts of the common man in the society we are studying.

But I do not think that we ought to confine ourselves to the raw material provided by the "principles that the people themselves give" (1/12).

* I use this convention throughout to refer to the text. "1/10" means *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 1, page 10.

[1] *Editors' note*: The passage reads thus: "...because our *primary* object is a system of ideas. It is a matter then, *broadly speaking*, of a sociology of values: *first* we must describe the common values and take care not to mix up facts of 'representation' with facts of behaviour...". The words we have italicised show that the task is not strictly nor limitatively equated with a "sociology of values" as Dr. Bailey says. The critic might perhaps claim that what is to come next, after this *first* step, is not made clear in the following text. However, one reads on the next page: "The sociologist has to construct a view in which the representation is preserved as it presents itself and at the same time is seen in its relation to its non-conscious counterpart". Or again, p. 18: "The system of values is quite clear and coherent... The difficulty begins when one confronts the values with the actual behaviour". The passage quoted from Mauss belongs to the study of religion; the second half of it – which concerns behaviour: "who are..." – cannot be left out as Dr. Bailey does a little further. To sum up, in our view it can be argued that we make too much of ideas, or that we put them unduly at the beginning, but not that we are exclusively after a "sociology of values".

I do not think that our only task is to make sense of the "flagrant contradictions in popular thought" (1/12) by abstracting out consistent elements. A valid sociological understanding can be achieved, given certain problems, by making abstractions immediately from behaviour or from other non-verbal information, and by using only our own concepts and evading the ideas of the people (supposing they have any ideas, which is not always the case). In other words, sociology does not consist only of a sociology of values, and a part of our understanding can be derived from behaviour. This is not to deny that there is a sociology of values; only to say that "what it is that people believe and think" is not the whole field of sociology, as the editors seem to me to be arguing.

This is a fundamental criticism and may be of the type to which I referred above, when I spoke of choice of interest. I have no right to say that the editors ought to be interested in something more than the sociology of values. The choice is theirs. But one would have liked a clearer statement that this is a choice, and that alternatives exist.

If we concern ourselves with activities as well as values, with what men do as well as what they think, there are certain advantages to be gained. I see them as advantages, although the editors could properly represent them as a step backwards towards the "complexity and inconsistency" which they deplore.

I cannot understand the editors' point of view on the subject of complexity. "The true solution is simple in principle: the constancy which we cannot find at the level of individual beings is very often revealed when we rise to the level of the relations between these beings. In this way the sort of nightmare of perpetual diversity which haunts the naive observer is banished. . . . we have not to do with things, but with structural facts. . . Only this view allows us to describe the phenomena in all their diversity without adding to or substracting from them" (1/13–14). The first half of this observation makes complete sense: it is another way of saying that by a process of abstraction we make a system. Yet how can we at the same time claim that this allows us to describe phenomena in all their diversitiy, without adding to or subtracting from them? Abstraction, surely, is a process of subtracting away diversity, and thus exposing the constancy. The very thing which a structural analysis (whether of ideas or of behaviour) does *not* do is "to describe phenomena in all their diversity".

It will be my contention that the analysis of Indian society as a system of values (or ideas) becomes in fact a strait-jacket, which very quickly prevents further movement. A very limited range of social phenomena

can be fitted into this strait-jacket, and in the process of fitting others there is more than a little distortion of the evidence.

At an early stage the editors nail to their mast the postulate that India is one . "By putting ourselves in the school of Indology, we learn in the first place never to forget that India is *one*. The very existence, and influence, of the traditional higher, sanskritic, civilization demonstrates without question the unity of India" (1/9). "Indeed, the unity of India is a sort of common-place, and the existence of castes from one end of the country to the other, and nowhere else, should impose the idea." (1/9) On the same page the editors write: "...it is essential that this unity be postulated from the outset... If, for the sake of apparent simplicity, we refuse this initial postulate, we shall be led in fact inextricably into difficulty, and there will be no sociology of India except in a vague geographic sense." Thus, at the outset, we notice that we are not approaching the hypothesis that "India is one" in a spirit of detached scientific enquiry. We are warned that if our postulate turns out to be "wrong", then we have lost our intellectual "bread-and-butter" and we will become mere sociologists working in that vaguely geographical unity, India. Some of us do not find that prospect particularly distressing.

A postulate is something assumed as a basis of reasoning, and the editors therefore assert that it is impossible to think about Indian society, without first assuming that it is one. Clearly, before we can examine this statement, we have to fill in some of the empty spaces in the rhetoric of "India is one". In the light of the editors' definition of what sociology is, we might translate "The whole of Indian society can be understood as a single system of ideas or values".

One has only to look at this statement to realise that "India" – or, as I have translated it "the whole of Indian society" – does not mean the ideas and values (let alone the behaviour) of everyone who lives within the Indian sub-continent. I have no doubt that, as an exercise, the editors could find some common ground in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Utilitarianism, Marxism, Socialism, and all the other ideas and values which are relevant to social behaviour in India, for they have displayed no little ingenuity in finding order in complexity. But the editors are in fact concerned with only one system of values – Hinduism. In short, we have discovered that the editors equate "Indian sociology" with an analysis of the values of Hinduism. Equally, the postulate "India is one" becomes translated into "The ideas of Hinduism form a coherent system".

At the outset the editors have taken a seven-league step towards proving the unity of India, for they have excluded from their definition of India all ideas and values which are obviously not going to fit even into the Procrustean bed which the editors have constructed out of Hindu ideas concerning kinship and religion.

Now let us look at some of the distortions.

The editors feel some slight discomfort in their narrow bed, for they try to extend the values and ideas which fall within their range by projecting them upon societies which have up till now been regarded as distinguishable from the Hindus. Tribal ideas and values are to be included within the same system. "...most so-called 'primitives' in India are only people who have lost contact" (1/8).

We cannot discuss the evidence for this assertion, for it has not, as yet, been produced. But we might, perhaps, when assessing its value as an explanation of differences and similarities, rate it with the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy, which the editors demolish on 1/16. To borrow the editors' own words, it is a piece of "hypothetical history" (2/32). A discussion of whether in fact tribes and castes have similar values and therefore are part of the same system, must wait until the editors present their evidence.

A second distortion arises from the startling denial of "sociological reality" (1/25) to the village,[2] and the equally startling attribution of the same reality to Indian *civilization*. I would be happier to see these positions reversed.

It is admitted, firstly, that the village might qualify for inclusion in Indian sociology because there is an "*idea* of the village in Indian civilization" (1/26). But it becomes obvious, from the first line of the paragraph onwards, that the village, in spite of existing in the realm of ideas, is going to be black-balled, because it will not fit into the value system of Hindu religion. I do not think it is unfair to conclude that when the editors deny "sociological reality" to the village, and claim

[2] *Editors' note*: The reader might wonder how anybody can deny absolutely to the village any sort of "sociological reality". This is the passage: "But India, sociologically speaking, is not made up of villages. [A note refers to page 18 where it is said that the territorial factor is not a primary factor, but only a secondary factor in the social organisation]... To pose the opposition of village to civilisation is at once to have given the village a sociological reality which similar groups may have elsewhere and to have been deceived by the appearances". It should be clear that it is only a certain kind of sociological reality which is denied, as is seen also from the whole discussion on "Village Studies" (p. 23 sq.).

that it is not a "social fact", they are in fact announcing that they propose to ignore an awkward piece of reality, because it does not accord with their theories. To put it another way – and one with which the editors must agree – the analysis of Hindu religion is not much helped forward by the fact that Hindus live in villages; therefore villages are to be disregarded. Or, yet another way, there is said to be a "conflict" of some kind between caste-loyalty and village-loyalty. The religious values of the first conflict with the predominantly political and economic values of the second. If the editors can erase the second, then they implicitly claim that their "system" in some way subsumes the village.

This long attack on the village, and the shaky evidence used to help the attack forward, might not have been necessary had the editors said at the outset that they were interested only in systems of kinship and of religious belief. But let us examine some of the evidence used to deny "sociological reality" to the village, and see why I call it shaky. We will certainly have to conclude that while the village may not have "sociological reality" (in whatever sense the editors use those words), membership of a village is a significant role in explaining some forms of social behaviour. Whether and in what sense these relations are less "real" than caste relations, is for the editors to explain.

The argument concerning the village runs between 1/26 and 1/32. The gist of the argument, in one sentence, is that there is no such thing as village "solidarity", but villages are held together by the concentration of force in the hands of the dominant caste. The village, therefore, is to be understood in terms of the caste system, in terms of the relation between the dominant and dependent castes. In the latter part of their discussion the editors go on to argue that just as the internal organization of the village is reducible to caste, so also relations between villages are to be understood in terms of kin relations in the dominant caste.

Let us examine some of the evidence on which this argument is based. "Whether a man is speaking of his own village, or of another village, unless he positively specifies another caste by name, he is referring to his caste fellows" (1/26). I wonder how the editors can be so sure of this? In their fieldwork did they never encounter a statement which must refer to the village community, irrespective of a particular caste? From the evident richness of the senior editor's field material, one would not think so. Yet the examples they produce are clearly one-sided: one concerns marriage, and the other concerns comparative ritual status within a caste – both primarily intra-caste concerns. I can remember a visitor from a distant village, watching the people of Bisipara repairing

an earth dam, and remarking that nowadays you would never get such co-operation in his village. This visitor was speaking of another village; but he was not referring to his caste-fellows; he was making a statement about inter-caste relations *within a village*. It is certainly true that *sometimes*, in the appropriate context, a man will use the name of a village to stand for his caste-fellows in that village. But it is not true, as the editors claim, that he always does so.

The next step in the editors' argument is to prove that "village solidarity" does not exist. They show, convincingly, that subordinate castes, so far from acting out of a sense of loyalty to the village, are constrained at every step by the members of the dominant caste.

The concept of "village solidarity" is, in some ways, unfortunate; its referent, if anything, is psychological; it does not seem to help in the analysis of social relations; and it has exposed Professor Srinivas, who used it in this debate, to considerable misunderstandings on the part of his readers, especially on the part of the editors of *Contributions*. Yet there is still something to be salvaged from it. In spite of what the editors say, there are occasions, at least in the villages in which I have lived, on which people seemed to me to be displaying an *esprit de corps*, which was not, specifically, loyalty to the dominant caste. But I would not insist on the point, since a demonstration of motivation is far from easy.

In any case we do not need examples of that kind to show the "sociological reality" of the village. As I at least understand it, "sociological reality" is not proved or disproved by the presence or absence of "solidarity", nor of feelings of loyalty. "Sociological reality" pertains to social relations. The editors take great pains to show that "loyalty is not to the village as such, but to the dominant Okkaliga, whose power is both political and economic" (1/29). In other words there are social relations in which are involved political and economic interests, between the dominant and dependent castes. In my experience people are "loyal" (in some vague sense of that word) to their village. But it is not that which constitutes the sociological reality of the village: that reality lies in relationships. If the strait-jacket of a "sociology of values" prevents us from considering the economic and political relationships within the village, then it should be discarded. It seems to me that if one disallows the editors' narrow definition of sociology, then their attempt to disprove the "sociological reality" of the village, has in fact amply proved it.

"But", the editors might argue, "this is the naïvest of misunderstandings. We have succeeded in showing that when Professor Srinivas

talked of the solidarity of the village, he was in fact referring to a caste relationship – that between the dominant and dependent castes. We have therefore shown that the village is a 'secondary factor in relationship to the two fundamental factors of kinship and caste' (1/18). We need not treat the village as a sociological reality, because anything we say about it will in fact be derivable from our propositions about kinship and caste. The village, therefore, is subsumed in kinship and caste." The editors do not, I think, make explicit use of this argument, when they are discussing the dominant caste, but it is implicit in what they say.

If we adopt this view, we are faced with certain difficulties, which the editors do not discuss. In some situations the village relationships remain stubbornly irreducible. From the point of view of economic and political interests, as the editors themselves demonstrate, the village is a sociological reality. For instance, within the analytic framework supplied by the editors, can we adequately deal with the fact that it is not the dominant caste as such which controls Rampur villagers, but that section of the caste which is located in Rampur *village*? And how are we to accept the unreality of the village when we read that the decisions of a caste court can be set aside by village elders (1/28)? How are we to account for the fact that the dominant caste is divided "village-wise"?

There is one way out of this impasse, which the editors might have taken, but once again the steps between their arguments need to be made explicit. I refer to the transition (1/29) from the discussion of the dominant caste to the argument about relations between villages. If the editors could show that the relationships between villages are to be understood in terms of the kin relations of the dominant caste, then they might be able to say that villages are in fact only segments of a certain order in a kinship system. Once again caste and kinship would be shown to be primary, and once again the village would be divested of its "sociological reality".

The editors make a half-hearted attempt to do this. "This basic kinship organization of villages within a certain area is perhaps more common than is often thought if indeed it is not an all-India phenomenon" (1/29). One can think of examples readily enough: the editors mention the "Jāṭ complex" (1/29); clanship has something to do with the inter-village organization of the Konds.* But the editors do not attempt to follow up their claim that the "basic kinship organization of villages" is an "all-India phenomenon". They side-track into a dis-

* See my *Tribe, Caste, and Nation* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

cussion of the kin-organization of different castes, and then return obliquely to the point using what they elsewhere stigmatize as "hypothetical history". They argue that if villages to-day are not organized on the basis of the kinship system of the dominant caste, there was nevertheless a time when they were so organized. For myself I am very willing to deal with this kind of argument, but I am surprised to find the editors of *Contributions* entertaining it. "When [a dominant caste ceases to be dominant] either the whole principle of village groupings breaks down and the villages are isolated or else a new alignment based upon kin-ties of the new dominant caste tends to emerge" (1/30).

At this stage of the editors' argument we need Ariadne's thread, for we are indeed in a maze. On one page (1/29) we read that a "basic kinship organization of villages" which is "based upon a process of lineage secession" may be "an all-India phenomenon": on the next page we are told that "the whole principle of village-groupings breaks down and the villages are isolated". Both statements are given in the present tense, although in the light of the later statement it is clear that the editors, when they talk of a "basic kinship organization of villages", are referring to the past. But perhaps I mistake their meaning; perhaps, after all, they are using "basic" in the sense of "historically prior" and "secondary" (in the phrase "[the village is] a secondary factor in relation to the two fundamental factors of kinship and caste") in the sense of "later developed". In this sense of hypothetical history those words could make sense: if they use "basic" to mean "logically prior", then they have yet to prove their case. One wonders also whether the editors would agree that those villages which are "isolated" have "sociological reality".

Let us pick up the thread of argument. The editors begin with the postulate that India is one; by this they mean that the values of Hinduism can all be shown to be part of a single system; in order to do this they have to argue that intra-village and inter-village relationships are both subsumed in the principles of caste and kinship, and in order to make this argument plausible they have to ignore political and economic relationships within the village, and to offer us, as an explanation of inter-village relationships, a hypothetical reconstruction of the past. What, we may ask, are we to do with "feudal" (for want of a less controversial word) relationships, or indeed with the role of the several bureaucracies that have governed all or parts of India? Are they reducible to ideas of caste and kinship?

To this question the editors have a short and irrefutable answer. It is that they are not interested in politics or economics, but only in

Hinduism, which they regard as a combination of kinship and religious values. No-one can deny that this is a legitimate field of interest. But we can object when the editors attempt to elevate their particular interest and claim that phenomena which will not fit into their scheme have no "sociological reality". One might refer to the fable of the blind men and the elephant.

The editors end their essay on Mrs Karve's book with a Bœotian quip: "As unpleasant as it may appear to some, one has to choose between sociology and culturology" (1/64). This taunt could well be directed at themselves. Let us now examine their insistence upon the importance of Indology, their anxiety for the welfare of *Indian* sociology (is there also *Indian* chemistry?), and their distress at the prospect of having no sociology of India, "except in a vague geographic sense". Both these aspects of their writing spring from an insufficiently rigorous distinction between cultural and social facts.

The editors do not appear to regard interaction, even in the widest sense of that word, as a necessary criterion for the definition of a society. When discussing the unity of India, they profess amazement that the "existence of castes from one end of the country to the other, *and nowhere else*" (1/9: my italics) and "the very existence, and influence, of the traditional higher, sanskritic, civilization" (1/9) have not convinced people of the unity of Indian society. There is no suggestion in these phrases that the limits of the social whole are to be drawn, in one way or another, on the basis of interaction: it is sufficient that people should have similar values, or customs, or a similar culture, or civilization.

Let us see where this leads us. Professor Hutton has already pointed out that it leads to Indonesia.* But I would make a different point. I have no doubt that the editors can define "alliance" or "purity and impurity" in such a way as to refer only to India. What then becomes of comparative sociology? To the Indologist what is unique in India is his interest. The comparative sociologist, on the other hand, wants to find out what India has in common with other societies – or, to phrase it more accurately, he wants to find out what, in the particular society in India he happens to be studying and which he has limited on a criterion of interaction, is found also in other societies. A definition of caste which rules out comparison with, for instance, the Southern States of America or even with South Africa, is useless for comparative sociology.

* *Man*, October, 1958, Art. 229.

The unique is *scientifically* incomprehensible. The unique can be comprehended only intuitively or through a mystical experience. I forbear to suggest that the editors have had this experience, although their style suggests it.

Nadel tells us that "society" is a higher level of abstraction than is "culture".* At this level cultural similarities become irrelevant. "Mauss", we are told, "...showed Rivers that the Todas of the Nilgiris were much more Hinduized than that author had perceived" (1/8). What has this to do directly with the merits of Rivers' sociological analysis? "If we wish to understand the situation of a Brahman in a particular village we must know what the Brahman stands for in Indian civilization ..." (1/25). There is a grain of truth in this (to be described in a later paragraph), but in the last resort to explain behaviour in a village by an appeal to all-India values, is a side-step from sociological to cultural explanations, and from the point of view of sociology cultural explanations simply beg the question. It is no explanation of the way villagers behave towards their Brahman to say that all over India villagers are behaving in the same way, or that this kind of behaviour is described in certain texts.

At this point I must be careful, for, unlike the editors, I am willing to allow other people to have their interests. To chart the spread of Sanskritic traits (whether conceived of as elements or as relationships between elements) is a legitimate exercise. But it is quite different from the sociological analysis of a society. If, under the stimulus of believing that "most so-called 'primitives' in India are only people who have lost touch...", the editors in some future issue show that the religious values of Adibasis and of Hindus have some similarity, I will not deny that this is an interesting field for exploration. However, no matter how great the similarity, a properly sociological analysis of those same Adibasis will remain to be done.

In my view a knowledge of cultural values is only the beginning or the raw material of sociological analysis. The more we are familiar with the culture of the society we are studying, the better our insights into sociological problems. In other words we need to know the culture in exactly the same sense as we have to know the language: but the analysis we make is sociological, and such an analysis should be kept quite distinct from culturology, just as it is kept distinct from linguistics. What the editors are advocating is not sociology at all, but a form of

* *The Foundations of Social Anthropology* (London, Cohen and West, 1953), p. 81.

culturology. It is only as culturology that the subject can be made distinctively "Indian". The editors refer to the "science of sociology" (1/41). This might be a slip of the pen or "science" here might be a loose word for knowledge, but if they mean more than that they must explain why they expect to find a distinctively "Indian" sociology. What is distinctively Indian belongs to the particularistic disciplines of culture and history; sociology deals in systems and to my mind the Indian sociologist is a person who happens to be working in, or happens to have been born in, India. There can be no "Indian" sociology except in a "vague geographic sense", any more than there are distinctively Indian principles in chemistry or biology.

If I have the opportunity later, I would like to discuss the editors' view of social change. "Truly structural changes are rarely observed and are unlikely to be observed even in the course of a whole lifetime" (1/37). This is, to say the least of it, a very debateable point of view, and we cannot discuss it until we know what the editors would consider "truly structural changes". Again I find it difficult to see what is behind "...it is changes which affect the dominant caste most fundamentally which are likely to bring about structural changes in the future" (1/37). Unless I misunderstand it, this statement should at least be amended to refer not to the dominant caste as such, but to its relations with dependent castes. In the case of Bisipara* structural changes have come about through relationships which the *untouchables* have established with outsiders. But, clearly, we do not have enough of the editors' considered views on change to be able to discuss them adequately. I would be happy to see a future issue devoted to theoretical issues in the study of social change in India. How, for instance, is the study of change, in which many of us are interested, to be fitted into the editors' definition of "Indian sociology"?

Finally let me say a few words about their criticism of Dr. Marriott. "In this connection we cannot conceal the fact that there is a major difference in emphasis between ourselves and... [Dr. Marriott, whose] ...discussion is limited only to the elements of religion and is not concerned with the relations between those elements..." (1/39). As I have already said, neither of these points of view seem to me to be that of the sociologist. But that is not the point I wish to raise here. I draw attention

* See my *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1957).

to a very odd kind of inverted ethnocentrism on the part of the editors. One editorial criticism of Marriott's classification of culture into "little tradition" and "great tradition" is that "a part of village religion is not conceptually separable *for the villagers*" (1/40: my italics). In other words Marriott is wrong to make a distinction which the villagers themselves do not make, and the editors clinch their argument with a piece of very curious home-spun wisdom – "People are not naïve in their religious behaviour..." (1/40). What, then, has become of "the necessary but implicit links" (1/12) which are said to underlie popular thought? Are not people equally indifferent to, and unaware of, for instance, "imitation and repudiation", or naïve about the formula "Given the hierarchical superiority of purity, opposition and segmentation are also implied" (2/34)? The test of popular indifference seems to me no test at all. Does popular indifference to the life-cycle of the mosquito, make that insect irrelevant to the study of malaria? No; if they want to convince Dr. Marriott that he should be interested in other things, then the editors will have to find better arguments than this.

I have no doubt that the editors will say that I have not understood their point of view and that my criticisms misrepresent it. If this is so, the fault is not entirely mine. Firstly, their arguments are not always clearly expressed, particularly in "For a Sociology of India" (1/7–22). Secondly, there is an unfortunate tendency to rely on assertion rather than evidence, as, for instance, in the argument that "India is one" at 1/9. Thirdly, the editors discourage a sympathetic examination of their ideas by the emotive language which they use. Those who might fail to agree with them are characterized as "naïve" or "unwary" or warned that they will "fail at the outset". Many people who have missed the very special and narrow meaning which the editors attach to "Indian sociology", will have been offended by the astounding arrogance of "the sociology of India has only properly begun in the last ten years" (1/24).

Let me finish by restating the two main parts of my argument. Firstly, the editors' definition of "Indian sociology" rules out of consideration all but a small field of social relations. While such specialization is desirable, it is absurd to try to justify one's personal interests by claiming that all social relations outside one's own particular field lack "sociological reality". Secondly, what the editors claim to be "Indian sociology" seems to me to be a branch of culturology. In fact sociology in India is a part of sociology everywhere. The editors deny that "interest is separate from method and both are undetermined by the material

to be studied" (1/41). Certainly these three things are connected. But let us not pretend that to work as a sociologist *in India* is thereby to be committed to a particular interest and a particular method.[3] For the sociologist India offers many problems. The problem which the editors have chosen is only one of many.

If the editors see this as a step backwards towards "complexity and inconsistency", then I can only answer that it is a necessary step; complexity is not conjured away by question-begging denials of "sociological reality".

[3] *Editors' note*: There must be some misunderstanding here, as we have only pretended to present "one particular approach". Apart from the text on the back of the cover, we may perhaps refer to the concluding lines of the first article (No. 1, p. 22): "Finally, we should stress the personal nature of the views which have been offered here. The subject is still in its infancy and others may define it in a quite different manner. This is a reason for us to affirm one clear orientation as a tendency among others".

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IV